

In Nigeria, 49 Christians killed, 27 kidnapped

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KADUNA, Nigeria (BP)—At least 49 people were killed and 27 others kidnapped in attacks on Christian communities in southern Kaduna, Nigeria, early this week, Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported.

While Fulani militia are blamed for the Sept. 26-27 attacks, many Fulani herdsman live peaceably alongside Christians and other Muslims and are not involved in the ongoing violence, said Khataza Gondwe, CSW advocacy director and team leader for Africa and the Middle East.

“It’s Fulani militia because they are an irregular, armed faction, trained, that are attacking in a very organized and orchestrated manner,” she said. “There’s a distinction between the Fulani settlers that the people have known for many years, and these people who are coming in to attack.

“That’s why we use that distinction, Fulani militia, so we identify them as the armed faction, as opposed to the rest of the Fulani people who are peaceably living side by side with them, in many instances, or just going about their ordinary business.”

In the deadliest among the latest attacks, militia killed 40 people and injured eight others in a “well-coordinated attack” on the Madamai and Abun communities Sept. 26 around 6 p.m. local time, a Catholic priest who witnessed the attack told authorities.

A “significant number” of attackers first killed people known to coordinate security for the community and their families before murdering other victims and burning down 20 homes, CSW reported. Another Catholic priest, Cosmos Michael Magaji of St. Thomas Quasi Parish in Mallagum,

listed the names of 33 Catholic victims murdered.

Most of people kidnapped were from evangelical church

The next day, Sept. 27, militia killed at least one person, injured an untold number of people and kidnapped 27 others in the Gabachuwa community of the Kachia local government area. The murder victim and most of those abducted were members of the Evangelical Church Winning All, sources told CSW.

In a second Sept. 27 attack, militia killed eight people, injured six and burned several homes in an attack on Kacecere village in the Zangon Kataf local government area of southern Kaduna.

CSW founder and president Mervyn Thomas expressed heartbreak for residents of southern Kaduna who face “relentless violence on a near daily basis,” and joined community leaders in calling for increased security.

“The state and federal governments must do far more to protect all vulnerable communities in an unbiased manner and to combat the threats posed by Fulani militia and other armed non-state actors” Thomas said.

“This is also not the first time allegations have been made of inadequate protection despite warnings of an impending attack. This is concerning, and must be investigated by the Nigerian government, and failing that, by the wider international community.”

Christians not only targets of Fulani

militia

Religion is not always the main driver of the attacks. Christians are targeted in Nigeria's Middle Belt, including southern Kaduna, but Fulani militia attacks in northwest Nigeria, including northern Kaduna, also target Muslims, Gondwe said. Marauders in northern Kaduna are often referred to as bandits or violent gangs.

"The Fulani bandits, the ones who are attacking communities in the northwest ... these bandits are attacking even Muslim communities," she said. "The people they're targeting primarily in the northwest are Hausa Muslims—now we're talking about a different tribal group—who are indigenous to the area of Nigeria." Hausa farming communities are primarily impacted in the northwest, while Christian family communities are targeted in the Middle Belt.

Fulani militia are driven by various motivations including a desire to gain control of the land for capital gain, but "religion is increasingly used as something that draws people to the group, whether people are manipulated through it or they feel it's a religious duty, and then you have the ethnic part as well, the shared ethnicity with the attackers," Gondwe said.

The predominantly Christian ethnic minority tribes in southern Kaduna have experienced "relentless attacks since 2011," CSW said. The violence occurs despite the fact that 11 military installations are headquartered in southern Kaduna.

On Sept. 12, a pastor and at least 13 others were killed by Fulani militia in the Zangon Kataf local government area, the site of one of the Sept. 27 attacks.

As a people group, Fulani are the world's largest nomadic group, numbering 20 million or more and mainly dispersed across western Africa.

In addition to Nigeria, the largest Fulani populations are in Mali, Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal and Niger, with others living in the Central African Republic and Egypt, among other areas.