

# More than two dozen Christians killed in Nigeria

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NIGERIA (BP)—Militant Fulani herdsmen killed at least 25 Christians in several attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt in April as the local government did little to intervene, according to *Morning Star News*, an independent news service focused on the persecution of Christians.

The unfettered attacks could lead to a regional civil war in Nigeria's Middle Belt, a representative for religious liberty advocate International Christian Concern said May 5.

"A full-blown civil war between the Fulani people and the rest of the indigenous people around them could very well happen," said Nathan Johnson, International Christian Concern's regional manager for Africa.

"The Nigerian government has turned a blind eye daily to these attacks. At some point it's got to give, and the government, if they don't step in and start protecting the civilians, the civilians will start protecting themselves."

## Attacks on villages in Kaduna

In the latest reported attacks, militant Fulani herdsmen killed 13 Christians and kidnapped 13 others in five villages in Kaduna state April 23-25, *Morning Star* reported Monday. More than 1,000 villagers were displaced in the attacks.

The dead reportedly include Baptists, Catholics as well as members of the Evangelical Church Winning All, the United Church of Christ in Nations and Assemblies of God churches. Others fled for their lives as militants

stole livestock and large quantities of food.

In other villages in Kaduna, militant herdsmen killed five Christians at an April 12 wedding, kidnapping the couple who were marrying and some church members. Militant herdsmen also killed seven other Christians in three attacks spanning through April 21.

On April 26 in Plateau state, militant herdsmen pulled a Christian couple from a motorcycle and attacked them with machetes, sticks and short swords, leaving the husband with severe head wounds. The couple are members of the Christ in Nations congregation in Rachos village, *Morning Star* reported.

## **Government failed to protect Christians**

Peter Aboki, president of the Gbagyi Development Union in Kaduna State, told *Morning Star* the government has not defended Christians against the attacks. Herdsmen occupy the villages, preventing Christians from returning.

“We want the government to do something urgently, because Christians are being killed or abducted almost on a daily basis,” *Morning Star* quoted Aboki. “Those areas are becoming a no-go area as a result of the deadly activities of herdsmen, and we want the government to do everything possible to stop this frequent loss of lives and destruction of property.”

Such attacks would be more rampant in the scenario of a civil war, Johnson told Baptist Press.

“Two civilian populations going after each other in full-blown warfare, where they stop and kill, and have genocidal tendencies toward each other, because these attacks continue to happen year after year,” Johnson said.

“Thousands of people are killed and tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people are displaced.”

He described 2018 as the most violent year suffered by Christians in the Middle Belt with about 2,000 killed by militants, not including attacks by Boko Haram terrorists in northeast Nigeria.

In “2019, it did die down a little bit, but it’s unclear as to why,” Johnson said. “It doesn’t seem to have been government action.”

Some Fulani herdsmen are peaceful, he added.

“Not all Fulani herders are involved in these kind of attacks,” Johnson said. “Trying to identify an entire ethnic group as terrorists or attackers is dangerous and could lead to even worse problems. Despite this, there are definitely groups of militants who hide among the Fulani people or use that identity as a way to attack others.”

## **Watchdogs name Nigeria as dangerous for Christians**

Many displaced Christians are subsistence farmers who need their land for the most basic of needs, including food and clothing, International Christian Concern said in an April 30 press release.

“Despite this mass migration and devastation, the Nigerian government continues to turn a blind eye to the violence and hurt. They have yet to offer any solution to ending the chaos, any support to displaced families and any protection for communities that have been attacked numerous times but are unwilling to leave,” the release said.

“The Nigerian government’s negligence cannot continue without communities taking safety into their own hands. If that happens, it could

mean civil war in the largest country in Africa.”

Christian persecution watchdog Open Doors ranked Nigeria 12th in its 2019 and 2020 World Watch Lists of the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to live as a Christian. According to Open Doors, of 4,136 Christians killed worldwide in 2018, Nigeria accounted for 3,731. In 2019, 2,983 Christians were killed worldwide; Nigeria accounted for 1,350.

Christians represent 51.3 percent of Nigeria’s population, while Muslims living primarily in the north and middle belt account for 45 percent.