

Nigeria violence prompts broad-based religious liberty outcry

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ABUJA, Nigeria (BP)—Escalating violence that has killed thousands of Christians in Central Nigeria must be addressed by the international Christian community and by a Nigerian government that has harassed victims, a global religious liberty coalition noted after its 2019 consultation in Abuja.

The frequent attacks no longer can be blamed on a centuries-old land dispute between Christians and Fulani herdsmen, the Religious Liberty Partnership of 40 advocacy and aid groups said.

Instead, the violence is initiated by a militant faction of Fulani herdsmen and others intent on killing Christians, the group said in affirming a sentiment various advocacy groups voiced as early as 2017.

The Religious Liberty Partnership drafted a public statement after its consultation in Abuja, where it discussed strategic issues and collaboration aimed at international religious liberty.

‘Stand with our brothers and sisters’

The Religious Liberty Partnership “calls on the worldwide church to stand with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria in prayer, and to provide long-term practical humanitarian support, pastoral care and trauma counselling particularly (to) those who have lost family and loved ones, livestock and livelihoods,” the group’s [statement](#) reads.

“We urge Christians worldwide to respond to this appeal for prayer and

action in recognition of the biblical injunction that we are one body, and that 'if one part suffers, every part suffers with it' (1 Corinthians 12:26)."

Among the most recent attacks, as many as 280 Christians were killed over several weeks spanning February and March.



Christians in Nigeria face intense persecution, but few in the West have noticed, said Benjamin Kwashi, an Anglican archbishop from Nigeria who spoke at Dallas Baptist University as part of the Speak Freedom Summit in 2016. (DBU Photo/Taggert Corn)

The Religious Liberty Partnership acknowledges apart from militant herdsmen several "peaceable Fulani herders and communities" and "the ongoing plight of Hausa and Fulani communities in northwest Nigeria which are also suffering kidnappings, murder and extortion by armed gangs."

Religious Liberty Partnership Chair Mervyn Thomas, chief executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, released the statement to media on May 16.

"The Abuja Statement highlights disturbing allegations that while members of the militia 'are neither traced nor prosecuted, members of victim

communities who articulate their concerns experience an array of repercussions that include threats, arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment,” Thomas said.

Among other requests, the statement calls on the worldwide church to pray for strength, protection and wisdom for religious leaders in Nigeria; raise awareness of violence in central Nigeria; and petition national governments to assist targeted communities in Nigeria.

Not just the central part of Nigeria

In addressing concerns in central Nigeria, the Religious Liberty Partnership laments terrorism in northeast Nigeria. There, the group urges the Nigerian government to facilitate the release of schoolgirl Leah Sharibu, kidnapped by Boko Haram in February 2018 and held only because of her Christianity; humanitarian worker Alice Ngaddah, held by the Islamic State West Africa Province since March 2018; and 112 Chibok schoolgirls still held by the Shekau faction of Boko Haram since being kidnapped in April 2014.

The statement references nine elders of the Adara tribe from Kajuru in southern Kaduna state, Thomas said, who have been detained since February and are facing “dubious charges” of incitement and culpable homicide.

The Religious Liberty Partnership “calls on the government to ensure an end to this ‘judicial harassment and arbitrary detention,’ while also regretting the emergence of ‘periodic retributive violence, as communities conclude they cannot depend on government for protection or justice,’” Thomas said.

The Religious Liberty Partnership includes the Alliance Defending Freedom, China Aid, International Christian Concern, Jubilee Campaign,

Middle East Concern, Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs, the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative and the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission.

“We are also concerned by the violence that continues to devastate farming communities in Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states, and a concomitant proliferation of small arms that contributes to a general rise in insecurity,” the statement declares. Well-armed Fulani militia have killed and displaced thousands, the Religious Liberty Partnership said.

Open Doors ranked Nigeria 12th in its 2019 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to live as a Christian. Of the 4,136 Christians killed in 2018, Nigeria accounted for 3,731, Open Doors said.