

Nigeria: Freedom of religion or belief

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CSW is an advocacy organisation specialising in freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and works on over 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Based in London, CSW has offices in Brussels, Washington DC and Nigeria, and holds United Nations (UN) accreditation. CSW has advocated for FoRB in Nigeria for over 20 years.

Constitutional and international commitments

Nigeria's federal constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief to all citizens, including the right to change religion or belief. The constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, place of origin, gender, religion or political opinion. In addition, Nigeria is party to a number of international agreements that guarantee FoRB and non-discrimination. However, violations of freedom of religion or belief are common, and since 2015 the situation of ethno-religious minorities in central Nigeria has deteriorated significantly.

Social and economic marginalisation on the basis of religion

The rights contained within the constitution and in international legislation to which Nigeria is party are not always enjoyed by religious minorities in northern and central areas, particularly following the adoption of shari'a law by 12 states. This effectively rendered Islam the state religion, in violation of the nation's secular constitution. Non-Muslims in shari'a states continue to report being denied the rights, opportunities, provisions and protections afforded to Muslims, and to which they are constitutionally entitled.

Violations include the denial of access to jobs in the security sector, among others; and the denial of promotion once employment is secured, with junior and often less capable members of staff given priority and seniority on the basis of their religion. Non-Muslims also report difficulties in accessing education or being permitted to study certain courses, such as law and medicine. In Borno State, Christians report that Kanuri Muslims are given preferential treatment in admission to higher education. In Kano State non-Muslim girls have been wearing the hijab since it became mandatory in 2003, and in 2017 schools in Kano and Jigawa states were closed during Ramadan.

The education sector is notoriously under-funded. Even within this context, significantly less funding is allocated by state governments to the establishment of schools in predominantly non-Muslim areas; and informal schools created with the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) experience difficulty receiving official registration. Several non-Muslim communities have also reported discrimination in the allocation of social amenities such as boreholes and solar power, which are supplied to neighbouring Muslim communities at government expense.

There has been a consistent failure to acknowledge and address this underlying, systematic religious discrimination, and a concomitant longstanding impunity in religion-related violence. This creates an enabling atmosphere for the emergence of violent groups with an antipathy to FoRB.

Recommendations

- Encourage the government of Nigeria to uphold freedom of religion or belief for all citizens, in line with its constitutional and international obligations; and to address the longstanding marginalisation of minority faith communities in shari'a states, in particular to monitor and strengthen implementation of existing laws to ensure non-discrimination for religious minorities in the north.
- Encourage the government of Nigeria to recognise and promote the concept of equality of citizenship, and to consider the creation of an Equality Commission with a mandate to promote FoRB and respect for differing religious identities. Nigeria should also be encouraged to consider initiating civic education programmes promoting FoRB, unity and pluralism, and human rights and equality training for local officials.
- Encourage the Nigerian government to allocate a larger percentage of its annual budget to education, ensuring every child can access primary education regardless of religious or ethnic background, and can proceed to further education on the basis of merit.

Church building restrictions and demolitions

In most shari'a states, construction of churches continues to be severely restricted. Many congregations cannot purchase land for the construction of buildings, or obtain certificates of ownership (C of O) for land. When churches seek permission to build they are either refused outright, or told to wait, and the waiting becomes indefinite. Church buildings are demolished for real or imaginary infractions, or when land is seized by local authorities, allegedly for 'development' purposes. For example, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Matazu Local Government Area (LGA), Katsina State, is in protracted negotiations to prevent the construction of a road through its compound.

Churches are regularly destroyed during violence. On 20 March 2015 two men on a motorcycle mounted an arson attack on a Living Faith Church in Giwa LGA, Kaduna State. On 1 April 2015 a Baptist church in Gidan Maso Village, Rogo LGA, Kano State, was torched, causing the daughter of Reverend Habila Garba to die from suffocation.

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The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kwara State Chapter reported that on 1 January 2018 extremists chanting “Allah is God,” and “Allah Akbar, this land belongs to the Muslims,” attacked Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Oke-Isegun in Taiwo Isale, looting and destroying buildings. Many female worshippers who were returning home were raped. While some were rescued, several ran naked to the Methodist Cathedral for safety. The assailants subsequently broke down the Methodist Cathedral’s gate, forcefully gained entry, and destroyed buildings and some of the vehicles there. Others attacked St Joseph Catholic Cathedral, destroying buildings and vehicles, setting statues of St Joseph ablaze, breaking a statue portraying the Resurrection, and robbing worshippers of phones, bags and other valuables.

Recommendations

- Urge the government of Nigeria to ensure that individual states respect FoRB in its entirety, including the right to own land and construct houses of worship.
- Urge the government of Nigeria to mount an investigation into the crimes committed on 1 January 2018 in Kwara, arresting and prosecuting any person found to have been involved in rape and theft or destruction of property. Nigeria must combat impunity by ensuring all perpetrators of religion-related crimes are brought to justice.
- Encourage the government of Nigeria to fully compensate religious groups that have been deprived of places of worship, facilitating access to viable alternative land.

Extrajudicial killings following blasphemy accusations

Extrajudicial killings of individual Christians often occur following unproven accusations of blasphemy. Collective punishment is frequently meted out, during which other Christians are maimed or murdered, and their homes, churches and businesses are looted and destroyed. Survivors are rarely if ever compensated for personal or corporate losses, and if arrested, perpetrators are rarely prosecuted.

For example, on 29 May 2016 violence erupted in Pandogari Town in Rafi LGA, Niger State, after Emmanuel Methodus, a 24-year-old trader, was accused of posting a blasphemous article on Facebook. He was murdered and his body was burned. Three other people died in an ensuing riot in which 25 Christian-owned shops were looted, and the Fellowship Baptist Church, Alheri Baptist Church, Four Square Gospel Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church were destroyed, along with several Christian homes.

In another blasphemy related case, 74-year-old Mrs Bridget Agbahime, a trader and retired pastor’s wife, was battered to death by a mob in Kofar Wambai market in Kano State on 2 June 2016, after being falsely accused of blasphemy by Dauda Ahmed, a rival trader who had harassed her on a number

of occasions. Mr Ahmed was arrested along with four other men; however, all were released in November 2016, despite overwhelming evidence against them.

Recommendations

- Urge the government of Nigeria to erode the impunity currently surrounding religion-related crimes by ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice, including any arrested in connection with the murders of Bridget Agbahime in Kano, Eunice Elijah in Abuja and Emmanuel Methodus in Niger.

Minority Muslim communities

Minority Muslim communities also experience violations of their right to freedom of religion or belief. For example, on 25 June 2015 the Upper Shari’a Court in Kano State sentenced Abdul Nyass and eight of his followers to death for blasphemy. The cleric from the Tijaniyya Muslim sect was accused of stating that Sheikh Ibrahim, the Senegalese cleric who popularised the sect throughout West Africa, was greater than the Prophet Mohammed. In the Nigerian legal system only civil courts have the capacity to deliver the death sentence, yet despite the unconstitutionality of these sentences there were no official condemnations. Instead, on 29 June the newly inaugurated governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, expressed his support for the verdict. Moreover, a press release from the state government declared the judgement would act as a deterrent.¹ The convictees were later transported to Abuja.

In December 2015 two days of attacks on establishments belonging to the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), the Shi’a minority in Kaduna State, left at least 700 adherents dead and many detained incommunicado and without charge. Among those detained were the IMN’s founder leader Sheikh Ibrahim el Zakzaky and his wife, both of whom were injured in an assault on their home by the army in which three of their sons died. Since then the authorities have ignored court rulings ordering his release. Around 50 Shi’a girls and women allegedly abducted by the army following the attack on Mr Zakzaky’s residence are also held incommunicado.

In October 2016 the Kaduna State government declared the IMN an illegal society and set penalties for IMN activities, including fines and/or imprisonment for up to seven years for membership. The governors of Kano, Katsina, Plateau, and Sokoto States, all members of the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC), also prohibited IMN Shi’a processions, including during Ashura festivities.

Possibly in response to an increase in local protests and external calls for the release of Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife, on 15 May the Nigerian government transported the couple from the DSS detention centre in Abuja to the Kaduna High Court where they were arraigned on eight charges, including abetting in culpable homicide, unlawful assembly and disturbance of the peace. The case was adjourned until 21 June, when a hearing on their application for bail was meant

1 Nigerian Bulletin, ‘Blasphemy: Kano Governor Hails Sharia Court for Sentencing 9 Persons to Death’, 1 July 2015 www.nigerianbulletin.com/threads/blasphemy-kano-governor-hails-sharia-court-for-sentencing-9-persons-to-death.113886

to have been heard. However, the bail hearing did not take place as scheduled due to the absence of the judge, and the couple remains in detention.

Recommendations

- Urge the Nigerian government to uphold the rule of law by respecting the court order for the release of Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife, and to either charge and try detained IMN members, or release them.
- The federal government must also encourage the governments of Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Plateau, and Sokoto States to repeal laws restricting the IMN's right to FoRB and to association and peaceful assembly.

Attacks by Fulani militia

There has been an escalation in attacks by increasingly well-armed Fulani herdsmen on farming communities in Bauchi, Benue, southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba States. Local observers have described the rising attacks as a campaign of ethno-religious cleansing.

Although there has been a long history of disputes between nomadic herders and farming communities across the Sahel, attacks are now occurring with such frequency, organisation and asymmetry that references to 'farmer-herder clashes' no longer suffice. Armed with sophisticated weaponry, including AK-47s, and in some cases chemicals, the Fulani herder militia is believed to have murdered more men, women and children in 2015, 2016 and 2017 than Boko Haram, destroying, overrunning and seizing property and land, and displacing tens of thousands of people. For example, during 2017 the herder militia claimed 808 lives in 53 villages across the four Local Government Areas (LGAs) in southern Kaduna alone, and burned down a total of 1,422 houses and 16 churches.² Moreover, during most of these well-planned attacks, cattle are nowhere in sight.³

Over 180,000 people in Benue State are currently living in IDP camps as a result of herder militia violence, while over 500,000 displaced people are living with relatives or in uncompleted buildings, and 80,000 children of school age are in IDP camps with no education.⁴ According to Governor Samuel Ortom, 1,878 people were murdered in Benue State between 2013 and 2016. An additional 750 people were severely injured and 200 went missing in violence that affected 99,427 households and destroyed billions of naira worth of property. Four hundred and ninety-two people have been killed in Benue since 1 January 2018.

In an illustration of how closely this violence correlates with religion, the local chapter of the Christian Association of

Nigeria (CAN) recently revealed that herdsmen have destroyed over 500 churches in Benue State alone since 2011.

The list of events presented below is not exhaustive, but offers a snapshot of the growing problem:

- Over 150 villagers were killed in Adamawa State in attacks in the run up to Christmas 2017.
- During the festive season, villages in southern Kaduna, Benue and Adamawa were attacked, churches destroyed and villagers killed and mutilated.
- On 24 December 2017, in southern Kaduna State, four villagers were killed as people gathered in the square of Nindem village in Godogodo district of Jema'a Local Government Area (LGA) in the evening to sing carols. A female choir singer was shot in the mouth and badly maimed.
- As the New Year dawned, Fulani gunmen invaded the home of a traditional ruler in Arak, in Sanga LGA, in the southern part of Kaduna State, killing him and his pregnant wife. Gambo Makama and his wife are reported to have died at around 12.05am. Their son was also shot, but survived and was hospitalised.
- 2018 began with an attack by Fulani herdsmen on Guma and Logo LGAs in Benue State, in which 73 villagers were massacred.
- Two Catholic priests and 17 parishioners were killed during morning Mass when their church in Mbalom village in Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State was attacked in the early hours of 24 April. Worryingly, on 18 April the Defence Headquarters had stated that troops deployed in Benue, Taraba and other trouble spots had been withdrawn due to an acute shortage of financial and logistical resources.
- At least 39 people were killed in militia attacks on Tse-Umenge, Mbakpase and Tse-Ali villages in Guma LGA on 25 April.
- On 26 April seven people who were sheltering in the Africa Church in Mbamondo, Ukemberagya/Tswarev ward of Gaambe-Tiev in Logo LGA, after having been displaced by militia violence, were killed in an attack on the church. After killing people in the church and community, militia men destroyed property and mounted a roadblock on Zaki Biam/Wukari road, where they seized motorcycles and valuables from travellers.

Attacks continue unabated⁵ and the situation has been exacerbated by seeming government inaction, or inadequate action, which in turn has entrenched impunity. Beyond intermittent verbal condemnations, little has been done to end the violence. No attacker has been brought to justice, let alone arrested, emboldening perpetrators even further. Attacks by herder militia have now spread to southern Nigeria and have caused a growth in vigilantism and periodic

² ThisDay, '808 Killed in Southern Kaduna Attacks, Says Catholic Church', 30 December 2016 www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/12/30/808-killed-in-southern-kaduna-attacks-says-catholic-church/

³ Reverend Y. S. Nmadu, General Secretary of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and CEO of CSW Nigeria, April 2018

⁴ Daily Post, 'Full text of Governor Ortom's speech during burial mass in Benue', 22 May 2018 <http://dailypost.ng/2018/05/22/full-text-governor-ortoms-speech-burial-mass-benue/>

⁵ See Appendix for a more extensive catalogue of death toll in attacks launched between 1 January 2018 and 29 April 2018.

retaliatory violence, as communities conclude they can no longer rely on the government for protection or justice. The only convictions so far have been swift sentences handed down by a judge in the High Court of Adamawa State to five people from Demsa LGA, who were found guilty of criminal conspiracy and culpable homicide in relation to the death of a Fulani herder on 1 June. A mere 11 days later, Justice Abdul-Azeez Waziri sentenced the men to three years in prison and death by hanging ‘to run concurrently’. They have been given 90 days in which to appeal.⁶

Following the murders of the priests and parishioners in Benue, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) issued a statement on 26 April urging President Buhari to consider stepping down in order to save the nation from total collapse. Among other things the statement said: ‘Since the President who appointed the heads of the nation’s security agencies has refused to call them to order, even in the face of the chaos and barbarity into which our country has been plunged, we are left with no choice but to conclude that they are acting a script that he approves of. If the President cannot keep our country safe, then he automatically loses the trust of the citizens. He should no longer continue to preside over the killing fields and mass graveyard that our country has become.’⁷ The CBCN is planning to demonstrate on 22 May – the day the two priests will be buried in the Benue State capital. It has also called on every diocese in Nigeria to ‘organize a peaceful rally or rosary procession or any other appropriate demonstration of solidarity.’⁸

Recommendations

- Call on the government of Nigeria to recalibrate security arrangements and resource its forces as a matter of urgency in order to offer sufficient protection to vulnerable communities, and to address the national security threat posed by the Fulani militia.
- Encourage governments of affected states to provide for the burgeoning number of IDPs caused by militia attacks within their respective territories. The government of Kaduna State in particular must be encouraged to open and resource an official IDP camp.
- Call on the Nigerian government to ensure that victims of current and past episodes of militia violence are adequately compensated, regardless of creed.

6 PulseNG, ‘Court sentences 5 men to death for killing herdsman’, 13 June 2018 www.pulse.ng/news/local/court-sentences-5-men-to-death-for-killing-herdsman-id8491437.html

7 A statement issued by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in the wake of the murder of two priests and their parishioners during the celebration of the Holy Mass in Mbalom, Benue State <http://cbcng.org/OnBenue.pdf>

8 News Ghana, ‘CBCN Calls For Massive Protest In Nigeria Over Persistent Killings As Church Plans To Bury Benue Priests’, 11 May 2018 www.newsghana.com.gh/cbcn-calls-for-massive-protest-in-nigeria-over-persistent-killings-as-church-plans-to-bury-benue-priests/

Collusion and violations

There are abiding concerns regarding the possible complicity of elements in Nigeria’s armed forces in militia attacks.

For example, on 3 December 2017 in Adamawa State, a jet and helicopter deployed by the armed forces allegedly bombed fleeing civilians, some of whom were sheltering in a church, instead of pursuing the Fulani militiamen who had rampaged through Demsa LGA, burning down around five villages. Moreover weapons raids in Plateau, southern Kaduna and Benue States have predominantly involved searches in victim communities, depriving them of anything useful for self-defence, such as local hunting guns and machetes. However, little effort appears to have made to find and disarm perpetrators of their semi-automatic weapons.

Suspicious of complicity were given added credence on 24 March, when respected former Army Chief of Staff and Defence Minister Lt General Theophilus Y Danjuma (retired) stated that the armed forces were “not neutral - they collude” in the “ethnic cleansing” of riverine states by the Fulani militia. He insisted that villagers must defend themselves, because depending on the armed forces will result in them dying “one by one. The ethnic cleansing must stop...in all the states of Nigeria otherwise Somalia will be a child’s play.”⁹

Recommendations

- Call on the federal government of Nigeria to address concerns regarding collusion or inaction on the part of military elements, and to ensure that security forces conduct themselves in accordance with human rights and humanitarian norms.
- Federal and state governments must also be urged to prioritise the unbiased enforcement of the rule of law. Allegations of complicity in violence must be investigated urgently, with suspects facing prosecution, and the armed forces must be restructured to better reflect the nation’s ethno-religious diversity.

Lawlessness and kidnappings

Lawlessness has increased as semi-automatic weapons proliferate unchecked. Kidnappings for ransom have risen, with a particular spike in incidents on the Kaduna-Abuja road, despite a large security deployment. According to one security agent: “Security operatives are finding it difficult to end kidnapping in that zone [Kaduna-Abuja]. It is too massive and occupied by mostly Fulani herdsmen. They know the terrain and thus, it will be suicidal, just walking into the forest to search for the hideouts.” There is a thin line between this lawlessness and the ethno-religious cleansing underway in the five central states. According to a captured kidnapper, in the forest “everyone is armed with AK47.” Another kidnapper inadvertently linked these activities to the ongoing attacks on local communities: “What they normally do is that if there is crisis, they will give us N1,000 each to risk our lives. I was

9 YouTube, ‘Danjuma speaks tough, accuses Nigerian Armed forces of colluding with Armed Bandits’, 24 March 2018 www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDZOKvFtIRk

only comfortable with it because they gave me access to guns which I sometimes use for kidnapping.”¹⁰

The Birnin-Gwari area of Kaduna, where thick forests provide cover from the security services, is now renowned for banditry, and the Emir of the area has encouraged its people to defend themselves. On 5 May 58 people died in an attack on Gwaska village in the area, many of whom are thought to have been vigilantes,¹¹ and on 15 May 87 people were reported to have been abducted on the Birnin-Gwari-Kaduna Highway.¹²

According to the Emir of Birnin Gwari, the armed bandits terrorising his domain hide in neighbouring Zamfara before attacking Birnin-Gwari, while those who hide in Birnin Gwari carry out attacks in Zamfara.¹³ During a two-day fact-finding visit to Zamfara State a Senate Ad hoc Committee on Security Infrastructure was informed that these armed groups consist of heavily-armed herdsmen and fleeing Boko Haram insurgents, and that security agencies were unable to contain them due to a lack of ammunition and insufficient personnel.

The secretary to the State Government of Zamfara informed the Commission that over 10,000 houses had been destroyed, over 200 people had been abducted, 1,321 killed, 1,181 injured, and scores of women and teenage girls abducted and gang-raped by these bandits, who are allegedly able to travel around on motorcycles in broad daylight brandishing weapons. The Speaker of the Zamfara State House of Assembly, Sanisu Garba Rikiji, added that over 20,000 residents across the state had been displaced by this violence, while the deputy governor warned that if left insufficiently addressed, the crisis in Zamfara had “the potential of consuming the state and escalating beyond its borders.”¹⁴

The violence in Zamfara is longstanding, with killings dating back to 2012. Its genesis is obscured in a history of cattle rustling, mining interests and vigilantes, with local Hausa communities generally suffering at the hands of all three. Regardless of its origins, it now resembles ‘an attempt at clearing villages in parts of the area of people,’¹⁵ and has facilitated a growth in lawlessness. It remains to be seen if the government’s recent decision to locate an army battalion in Birnin-Gwari will prove effective in ending the violence.

Recommendations

- Urge the government of Nigeria to combat the proliferation of small arms by disarming herdsmen and prohibiting the possession and use of such weapons by civilians who have not complied with the criteria outlined in Article 14 of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons.
- Ensure sufficient and resourced military manpower to address the violence caused by armed bandits in Birnin-Gwari and Zamfara.

Abduction and forced conversion

In most of Nigeria’s shari’a states, and particularly although not exclusively in rural areas, the education of Christian schoolgirls is frequently curtailed by abduction, forcible conversion and marriage without parental consent.

According to domestic law, anyone below the age of 18 is a minor. They cannot convert or marry without parental consent. The penal code punishes child abduction and carnal knowledge of minors with jail terms, and there are also penalties for anyone implicated in child betrothal and child marriage. Although strong, these legal provisions are rarely enforced, giving rise to impunity as abducted children remain in the hands of their captors despite their parents’ best efforts to retrieve them.

Parents seeking the release of their abducted daughters are generally informed they have converted and married, or are in the custody of Muslim traditional rulers or shari’a commissions, and have no desire to return home. Appeals to law enforcement agencies for assistance generally prove fruitless amid false claims by abductors that the girls are not minors, and fear on the part of the police of provoking large scale social unrest. This highlights an inequality before the law that ought not to exist in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation.

For example, in 2016 the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) raised the alarm over the abduction of 14-year-old Habiba Isiyaku from Wawar Kaza village in Kankara LGA, Katsina State. At the time of her disappearance Habiba had just passed her Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) ‘with flying colours’, and was starting Senior Secondary School (SSS1). According to Habiba’s parents, she was abducted on her way home from school on 16 August 2016. Subsequently she was forcibly converted and obliged to marry her abductor, Jamilu Lawal, with the reported endorsement of the Emir of Katsina, who is alleged to have received NGN50,000 (approximately GBP106) in dowry for her. When Habiba’s father went to the Emir’s palace to try to retrieve his daughter, he was made to sit on the bare floor and humiliated. Eventually the Emir sent an aide to inform him that Habiba could not be released to him because she had allegedly converted voluntarily and left home willingly. At a court hearing that took

10 The Sun, ‘MONSTERS: Shocking revelations by captured herdsmen’, 29 July 2017 <http://sunnewsonline.com/monsters-shocking-revelations-by-captured-herdsmen/>

11 Nigerian Tribune, ‘Birnin Gwar killings: We buried 58 bodies – Emir’, 7 May 2018 www.tribuneonline.com/birnin-gwari-killings-we-buried-58-bodies-emir/

12 DailyNaija, ‘How 87 Passengers Were Kidnapped Along Kaduna-Abuja Road’, 15 May 2018 <https://dailynaija.com/post/how-87-passengers-were-kidnapped-along-kaduna-abuja-road>

13 Independent Nigeria, ‘My people are killed every day – Emir cries out’, 6 April 2018 <https://independent.ng/my-people-are-killed-daily-emir-of-birnin-gwari-cries-out/>

14 The Sun, ‘How bandits rape, abduct, kill in Zamfara – Residents’, 8 March 2018 <http://sunnewsonline.com/how-bandits-rape-abduct-kill-in-zamfara-residents/>

15 SBM Intelligence, Weekly email update: ‘Nigeria’s killing fields continue to get deadlier’, 11 May 2018

place in January 2017 after a suit had been filed, a paper was presented, ostensibly from Habiba, claiming she was 18 years of age. The case continues.

Chibok Girls

Perhaps the best known cases of child abduction are those carried out by factions of the terrorist group Boko Haram. 14 April 2018 marked the fourth anniversary of the abduction of 276 female students from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State by Boko Haram. One hundred and seventy-six of these girls are from families belonging to the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). A handful escaped. Others were released following a series of negotiations, and allegedly in exchange for imprisoned key Boko Haram members and significant sums of money. One hundred and twelve girls remain unaccounted for, the majority of them Christians. According to Ahmad Salkida, a journalist who took part in negotiations with Boko Haram under the Jonathan administration to free the girls, 82 were killed either in crossfire or aerial bombardment, and only 30 remain alive, five of whom have reportedly 'become permanently embedded' in Boko Haram's 'doctrines and teaching programs', and have allegedly asked not to be included in future discussions on releases.¹⁶

Dapchi Girls

On 19 February 2018, 110 girls were abducted from the Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State, by the al-Barnawi faction of Boko Haram. The oldest abductees were 18 years of age; the youngest were 11. Credible sources allege that the security forces failed to act on advance warnings of an impending attack.¹⁷ On 21 March 2018 Boko Haram returned 105 girls to Dapchi. Five had reportedly died during the arduous journey to Boko Haram's hideout. The terrorists warned townsfolk not to enrol their children in school again, or else they would return.

Returnees confirmed that Leah Sharibu, the sole Christian among them, remained in captivity due to her refusal to convert and wear a hijab. Video footage of Leah's family soon after they learned of her plight showed her mother, Rebecca Sharibu, in a state of extreme shock. In a comment to Nigerian media her father Nathan Sharibu said, "They gave her the option of converting in order to be released but she said she will never become a Muslim. I am very sad...but I'm also jubilating too because my daughter did not denounce

Christ." Facing mounting criticism for brokering a deal that left one child behind, the presidency issued a statement on 22 March pledging that it would "not relent in efforts to bring Leah Sharibu safely back home to her parents." However, Leah is yet to return. On 14 May she spent her 15th birthday in captivity.

Recommendations

- Urge the government of Nigeria to address abduction, forced conversion and forcible marriage of non-Muslim girls, ensuring that individual shari'a states facilitate the swift return of abductees and bring to justice individuals and organisations implicated in disappearances.
- Urge the government of Nigeria to uphold the right of the child to education without discrimination, and to ensure protection for educational establishments in areas vulnerable to terrorist attacks.
- Call for the release and safe return of Leah Sharibu, and encourage and support efforts by the Nigerian authorities to bring about the safe return of the 112 Christian schoolgirls who remain unaccounted for.

Threats to freedom of expression

Restrictions on freedom of expression appear to be on the increase, particularly in, although not limited to, Kaduna State. Several reporters who have sought to highlight killings by the Fulani militia in southern Kaduna have been prosecuted for hate speech by the state government, even though 'hate speech' is not defined under Nigerian law.

For example, after several articles accurately depicting events in southern Kaduna, journalist Luka Binniyat was remanded in custody for 96 days, despite ill health, for an article based on information from a previously trustworthy source, which proved erroneous. He attempted to retract the story prior to publication, without success, and had apologised for it publicly, but was nevertheless arrested and remanded in custody. His case was repeatedly adjourned and he was subject to bail conditions far exceeding those required for his alleged crime. Mr Binniyat was released when these conditions were finally reviewed, but his trial continues.

The Kaduna state governor also shows scant regard for dissenting views within his own party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). On 20 February Governor Nasir El-Rufai is alleged to have personally driven a bulldozer to demolish a residence belonging to the Senator for Kaduna North. Senator Hunkuyi Suleiman had donated the building to a rival APC faction for use as a secretariat 'to avoid the activities of thugs'; however, the office was marked for demolition less than 24 hours after the move was announced. In a statement signed by its Director General the Kaduna State Urban Planning and Development Agency (KAPSUDA) claimed the demolition was part of operations the agency was undertaking across Kaduna metropolis in compliance with its mandate, adding that the area would become a public park. Two days after the demolition, the governor was caught on film greeting President Buhari at a National Executive Council (NEC) meeting, where the latter referred to him in Hausa as a 'bulldozer driver', eliciting laughter from other attendees.

¹⁶ Twitter, Ahmad Salkida (@A_Salkida), 17 April 2018 <https://twitter.com/ContactSalkida/status/986263061198790656>

¹⁷ CSW received initial information from sources on the ground which was later confirmed by Amnesty International's sources: Amnesty, 'Nigeria: Security forces failed to act on warnings about Boko Haram attack before abduction of schoolgirls', 19 March 2018 www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/nigeria-security-forces-failed-act-warnings-about-boko-haram-attack-abduction

The arrests and judicial harassment of journalists and bloggers for expressing views critical of officials, or contrary to official lines, appear to be part of a wider effort to curtail civil society and control the use of social media by a government that came into power assisted by social media. In May 2016 a draconian Bill for an Act to Prohibit Frivolous Petitions and Other Matters Connected Therewith, which was generally viewed as an attempt to gag the press and curtail freedom of expression, was eventually thrown out by the Senate following a sustained public outcry. In August 2017 the federal government, through the National Broadcasting Commission, issued a restrictive new broadcasting code for media houses.

In 2016 the Deputy Majority Leader of Nigeria's House of Representatives introduced the deeply flawed NGO Regulation Bill. The Bill proposes the creation of an NGO Regulatory Commission with powers to license NGOs. This would governmentalise NGOs, and could become a new source of corruption. The Bill requires NGOs to renew their licences every 24 months, and before an NGO spends any money received, it must secure permission from the Board. The Board will also license NGOs on co-operation with international bodies. The Board can refuse renewal for no reason, and waive all the requirements of the law, including registration. The Ministry of Interior will be able to direct the Board, including on whether to register or de-register any NGO. This would effectively make it impossible for those peacefully espousing views differing from the government to organise around those views with legal protection.

In a particularly alarming development, a 'Hate Speech' Bill is currently before the Senate. The Bill's sponsors claim it is aimed at discouraging harassment on the grounds of ethnicity, religion or any other grounds. However, its critics state its true purpose is to stifle free speech and creativity. The Bill prescribes stiff penalties for offences such as 'ethnic hatred': 'Any person who uses, publishes, presents, produces, plays, provides, distributes and/or directs the performance of any material, written and/or visual, which is threatening, abusive or insulting or involves the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words, commits an offence,' will either be given a minimum five year sentence or a fine of 'not less than N10 million or both'. It also prescribes the death penalty for situations where any form of 'hate speech' results in the death of another person. The law also seeks to establish an 'Independent National Commission for Hate Speech', to enforce hate speech laws across the country.

Recommendations

- Urge the Nigerian government to respect freedom of expression, protect press freedom, end malicious arrests and prosecutions of journalists, and respect peaceably expressed dissenting views.
- Urge the government of Nigeria to abandon the NGO Regulation Bill, and allow NGOs to continue to operate free from excessive interference.
- Urge the government of Nigeria to reject the Hate Speech Bill, and to formulate legislation that protects minorities, in line with the Rabat Plan of Action and Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 16/18.
- The government of Kaduna State must be urged to end the judicial harassment of journalists and arrests of members of victim communities who speak out about ongoing violence.

Appendix

Documented attacks in Central Nigeria by Fulani militia between 1 January 2018 and 29 April 2018

Using organisational records, a timeline issued by the Office of the President of the Nigerian Senate¹⁸ Nigerian news and other sources, CSW UK and CSW-Nigeria have compiled a list of 111 attacks by Fulani militia on communities in the middle belt of Nigeria between 1 January 2018 and the beginning of May 2018 (i.e. within a 120-day span).

1-6 January: 73 killed in Logo and Guma Local Government Areas (LGAs), Benue State
 1 January: 2 killed in Awe LGA, Nasarawa State
 1 January: 2 killed in Sanga LGA, southern Kaduna State
 1 January: 25 killed in Keana LGA, Nasarawa State
 3 January: 3 killed in Markurdi, Benue State
 4 January: 6 killed in Wukari LGA, Taraba State
 4 January: 1 killed in Gassol LGA, Taraba State
 5 January: 4 killed in Lau LGA, Taraba State
 5 January: 55 killed in Lau LGA, Taraba State
 6 January: 16 killed in Logo LGA, Benue State
 6 January: 7 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 8 January: 3 killed in Sardauna LGA, Taraba State
 8 January: 2 killed in Logo LGA, Benue State
 13 January: 10 killed in Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna State
 13 January: 1 killed in Makurdi LGA, Benue State
 14 January: 1 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 14 January: 1 killed in Ibi LGA, Taraba State
 16 January: 5 killed in Madagali LGA, Adamawa State
 16 January: 6 killed in Guma, Logo and Okpokwu LGAs, Benue State
 18 January: 11 killed in Madagali LGA, Adamawa State
 18 January: 1 killed in Karim Lamido LGA, Taraba State
 18 January: 5 killed in Madagali LGA, Adamawa State
 20 January: 1 killed in Barkin Ladi LGA, Plateau State
 21 January: 6 killed in Numan LGA, Adamawa State
 23 January: 9 killed in Ardo Kola LGA, Adamawa State
 24 January: 7 killed in Bokkos LGA, Plateau State
 25 January: 2 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 25 January: 8 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 26 January: 3 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 26 January: 2 killed in Ukum LGA, Benue State
 28 January: 2 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State

18 Daily Post, 'IGP Idris: Saraki's office releases list of killings in Nigeria in 2018', 11 May 2018 <http://dailypost.ng/2018/05/11/igp-idris-sarakis-office-releases-list-killings-nigeria-2018/>

Attacks contained in the list compiled by the Senate that were attributable to robbery have been omitted. Attacks on 24 and 27 January that claimed a total of 6 lives in Kaiama LGA, Kwara State, were reported to have been committed by 'unknown gunmen' and have been omitted due to a lack of clarity. Deaths in violence on 26 February in Kajuru LGA, Kaduna State, where 12 were killed, have also been omitted due to a lack of clarity. Other sources include #MiddleBeltMassacres on Twitter, Nigerian news sources and the Council of Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker.

29 January: 1 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 29 January: 7 killed in Keana LGA, Nasarawa State
 31 January: 1 killed in Jema'a LGA, southern Kaduna State
 31 January: 1 killed in Jema'a LGA, southern Kaduna State
 31 January: 9 killed in Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna State
 1 February: 4 killed in Gassol LGA, Taraba State
 1 February: 7 killed in Chukun LGA, southern Kaduna State
 1 February: 4 killed in Gassol LGA, Taraba State
 2 February: 10 killed in Song and Shelleng LGAs, Adamawa State
 2 February: 12 killed in villages in Keana LGA, Nasarawa State
 4 February: 6 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 5 February: 2 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 6 February: 8 killed in Obi LGA, Nasarawa State
 6 February: 6 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 8 February: 6 killed in Shelleng LGA, Adamawa State
 9 February: 3 killed in Anyii in Logo LGA, Benue State
 10 February: 2 killed in Benue State
 10 February: 3 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 11 February: 4 killed in Jema'a LGA, southern Kaduna State
 12 February: 2 killed in Kasseyo, Guma LGA, Benue State
 15 February: 1 killed in Plateau State
 19 February: 9 killed in Bakin Kogi, Jema'a LGA, southern Kaduna State
 25 February: 1 killed in Kogi State
 27 February: 20 killed in Demsa LGA, Adamawa State
 1-4 March: 20 killed in Sardauna LGA Taraba State
 5 March: 5 killed in Benue State
 5 March: 26 killed in Okpokwu LGA, Benue State
 7 March: 2 killed in Takum LGA, Taraba State
 8 March: 11 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 9 March: 9 killed in Bokkos LGA, Plateau State
 12 March: 26 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 13 March: 7 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 13 March: 1 killed in Lokoja, Kogi State
 14 March: 32 killed in Dekina and Omala LGAs, Kogi State
 14 March: 6 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 15 March: 3 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 15 March: 5 killed in Takum LGA, Taraba State
 19 March: 10 killed in Omala LGA, Kogi State
 20 March: 11 killed in Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna State
 22 March: 3 killed in Jos South LGA, Plateau State
 22 March: 2 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 24 March: 5 killed in Makurdi, Benue State
 26 March: 5 killed in Agatu and Guma LGAs, Benue State
 30 March: 6 killed in Bakin Kogi, Jema'a LGA, southern Kaduna State
 2-4 April: 24 killed in Benue State
 4 April: 6 killed in Chikun LGA, southern Kaduna State
 4 April: 4 killed in Takum LGA, Taraba State
 4 April: 10 killed in Gwer West LGA, Benue State
 5 April: 10 killed in Gwer West LGA, Benue State
 5 April: 5 killed in Donga LGA, Taraba State
 5 April: 30 killed in Gwer West LGA, Benue State
 5 April: 2 killed in Asso, Jema'a LGA, southern Kaduna State
 7 April: 4 killed in Bali LGA, Taraba State
 7 April: 2 killed in Agatu LGA, Benue State
 8 April: 5 killed in Birkin Ladi, Plateau State
 8 April: 5 killed in Obi LGA, Nasarawa State
 8 April: 4 killed in Keana LGA, Nasarawa State
 9 April: 1 killed in Guma LGA, Benue State
 10 April: 10 killed in Ukum, Logo LGA, Benue State
 10 April: 51 killed in Wukari LGA, Taraba State
 12 April: 41 killed in Ukum LGA, Benue State
 12 April: 2 killed in Makurdi, Benue State
 12 April: 41 killed in Ukum, Logo LGA, Benue State
 12 April: 2 killed in Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna State
 13 April: 5 killed in Bassa LGA, Kogi State
 14 April: 78 killed in Awe, Keana, Obi, and Doma LGAs, Nasarawa State
 16 April: 4 killed in Logo LGA, Benue State
 17 April: 2 killed in Logo LGA, Benue State
 18 April: 4 killed in Bassa LGA, Plateau State
 19 April: 1 killed in Gwer West LGA, Benue State
 19 April: 19 killed in Gwer East LGA, Benue State
 21 April: 22 killed in Guma, Benue State
 24 April: 19 killed in Gwer East LGA, Benue State
 24 April: 8 killed in Gwer West, Benue. State
 25 April: 38 killed in Gwer East, Guma LGA, Benue State
 25 April: 11 killed in Makurdi, Benue State
 25 April: 7 killed in Awe LGA, Nasarawa State
 26 April: 7 killed in Ihukan village, Logo LGA, Benue State
 28 April: 14 killed in Birnin Gwari LGA, Kaduna State
 29 April: 5 killed in Gwer West LGA, Benue State

Total casualties: 1,107

Violence in Birnin Gwari (and Zamfara State), where 46 deaths occurred, is attributable to attacks on Hausa communities by armed kidnapping groups, largely of Fulani origin. If excluded from the list, the death toll in four months purely from herder militia violence stands at 1,061.

In addition, within this timescale, 11 recorded attacks on communities in the south of the country left 21 people dead:

5 January: 1 killed in Akure South Local Council, Ondo State
 18 January: 1 killed in Imeko-Afon LGA, Ogun State
 18 January: 1 killed in Orin Ekiti, Ido-Osi, Ekiti State
 21 January: 2 killed in Anoicha North Local Council, Delta State
 28 January: 1 killed in Akure, Ondo State
 7 February: 1 killed in Oyo State
 11 February: 1 killed in Ipao-Ekiti, Ikole LGA, Ekiti State
 26 February: 2 killed in Delta State
 16 March: 4 killed in Edo State
 17 March: 5 killed in Ughelli North, Delta State
 28 April: 2 killed in Onocha-Olona, Aniocha-North LGA, Delta State

Documented attacks on Fulani communities between 1 January and 29 April

Of the seven instances of violence targeting Fulani herders or their communities recorded within this timescale, two occurred in the south of the country:

6 January: 4 killed in Lau, Taraba State

14 January: 1 killed in Ekiti State

28 January: 2 killed in Kadarko, Nasarawa State

13 February: 12 killed and 14 missing in Okere near Iseyin LGA, Ondo State

29 February: 7 killed in Gboko, Benue State

4 March: 20 killed in Mambilla Plateau, Sardauna LGA, Taraba State

5 March: 1 killed in Plateau State

Total casualties: 47, or 61, if the 14 persons who went missing following the 13 February attack in Ondo State are presumed dead.

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As Christians, we stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief.

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