

## **NIGERIA: Interim Report on Christmas Eve Militia Attacks in Plateau State**



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## **Introduction**

This report details CSW Nigeria's (CSWN's) initial findings regarding the attacks by militia of Fulani origin and their impact on farming communities in central Nigeria, with a particular focus on the 2023 Christmas Eve attacks on Bokkos, Barkin Ladi and Mangu Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Plateau State which continued to the early hours of Christmas Day, claiming at least 115 lives. This death toll is expected to rise further, as hundreds remain missing.

The Christmas Eve violence also resulted in massive displacement and a humanitarian crisis, with many forced to seek refuge in camps. The report aims to shed light on the gravity of the situation, highlight the affected communities, and emphasize the urgent need for action.

## **Background**

Since 2010, when around 500 people were killed in armed assaults on Dogo Nahawa, Ratsat and Jos villages in Plateau State, attacks by Fulani militia have been a source of increasing concern across Nigeria, and particularly in the central, or Middle Belt region. There has been a long history of such disputes between traditionally nomadic herders from the Fulani ethnic group and farming communities across the Sahel, which are often referred to as 'farmer-herder clashes.' However, current attacks in central Nigeria by militia men of Fulani ethnicity occur with such frequency, organisation, and asymmetry that the characterisation as 'clashes' no longer suffices.

In a region where ethnicity generally correlates with religion, ethnic minorities are invariably also religious ones. Consequently, the attacks by non-state actors armed with sophisticated weaponry, assume an ethno-religious coloration and increasingly constitute forcible displacement, as the ancestral lands of indigenous communities are frequently occupied after communities flee to safer areas.

While it is important to note that not all Fulani herders are involved in this violence, it is clear the activities of these well-armed factions have had a significantly negative impact on the region.

Since 2010 the militia has persistently targeted farming communities in Middle Belt states, with a significant surge in 2015, resulting in a remorseless increase in displacement, loss of lives, and property destruction, particularly in rural areas.

The impact of militia attacks on Plateau State has been devastating. They have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, and widespread destruction of homes, farmlands, and economic livelihoods.

The attacks also have long-term social, economic, and political implications. The communal tensions and distrust that arise from such violence pose significant challenges to peaceful coexistence and stability.

It is crucial to address militia activities in Plateau State effectively in order to ensure the protection of lives, promote dialogue, understanding between diverse communities and peaceful coexistence, and create an enabling environment for sustainable development.

## Methodology

Key CSWN contacts in the affected communities of Bokkos, Barkin Ladi and Mangu LGAs were instrumental in providing and confirming the information presented in this report.

Data was compiled by documenting the experiences of eyewitnesses regarding the attacks and their impact on the affected communities. The methodology involved capturing firsthand accounts and testimonies from individuals who either witnessed or were directly affected by the attacks through several means.

Interviews were conducted via telephone with survivors, community leaders and other relevant stakeholders. During these interviews detailed information was gathered regarding the attacks, including dates, locations, and numbers of casualties. These eyewitness testimonies provided invaluable insights into the nature and extent of the violence.

Additionally, photographs and videos were collected from the affected locations, and these visual materials were used for reference and to provide further evidence of the attacks. Wherever possible the collated information was cross-checked and verified through multiple sources to ensure accuracy and reliability. Corroborating testimonies from different eyewitnesses were sought to establish the consistency of accounts.

It is important to note that the eyewitness approach has its limitations; however, efforts were made to mitigate this by triangulating information and seeking additional sources of verification.

## Findings

The findings of this initial report focus solely on the coordinated attacks perpetrated by Fulani militia on communities in Plateau State on 24 December 2023. The Plateau State governor has described these attacks, which primarily targeted communities in the Bokkos, Barkin Ladi and Mangu LGAs, as ‘pure terrorism.’ It also documents the resumption of assaults primarily targeting communities in the Bokkos, Barkin Ladi and Mangu LGAs of Plateau State. While CSWN’s investigations are continuing, interim key findings have been collated and are as follows:

1. **Timing of Attacks:** The attacks began in the late hours of Christmas Eve with an assault on the Nisham community in Mangu LGA, and continued until the early hours of Christmas Day with an attack on Dares community in Bokkos LGA. This concentrated period saw significant

devastation and loss of lives and appeared to have been deliberately timed to disrupt the festive season. If sufficient security had not been drafted to the area, the attacks may have been even more extensive.

2. **Targeted Communities:** the communities that suffered the militia attacks are predominantly Christian and are located in the Bokkos, Barkin Ladi and Mangu LGAs.
3. **Impact on Communities:** Numerous lives were lost and properties destroyed; residents were forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in safer locations. Displaced individuals face a range of challenges, including limited access to basic necessities, trauma, and increased vulnerability.
4. **Pattern of Violence:** These attacks generally occur in the early hours of the morning and late hours of night, when residents are more vulnerable and often caught unawares. Among the acts of violence carried out by assailants are indiscriminate killings, burning of homes, destruction of food stuffs and farmlands, and looting of properties.
5. **Humanitarian Crisis:** The cumulative impact of these attacks has caused a significant humanitarian crisis in the affected areas. The displaced population, which includes women, children and the elderly, face hardships in terms of food insecurity, and access to healthcare and education.
6. **Communal Tensions:** The ongoing cycle of violence has exacerbated existing communal tensions, fueling mistrust and suspicion between different ethnic and religious groups. This hinders efforts towards reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, making sustainable peace building more challenging.

While factfinding efforts are continuing, CSW Nigeria's preliminary assessment of the damage inflicted on Christmas Eve 2023 is as follows:

- Number of communities attacked: 25
- Numbers of persons killed: 186 (confirmed by CSWN)
- Value of damages (houses, livestock, vehicles, foodstuff etc.): estimated to be several million Naira
- Estimated number of displaced persons: Around 10,000
- Estimated number of persons fleeing from other communities in fear of being attacked: Over 50,000

A significant number of displaced individuals from the targeted communities are currently residing in IDP camps, while others are seeking refuge with relatives, friends, and well-wishers.

These findings further highlight the severity and magnitude of the continuing attacks by Fulani militia in Plateau State. There is an urgent need for action, including humanitarian assistance, to alleviate the suffering of the affected population and address the widespread destruction caused by this violence.

## Recommendations

In light of the tragic and challenging situation that has persisted despite efforts to bring it to an end, CSW Nigeria urges the following interim recommendations:

1. **Urgent Humanitarian Interventions:** Immediate action should be taken by the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and humanitarian aid agencies or organisations to provide essential relief and assistance. This should include providing food, shelter, and psychosocial support to address the pressing needs of the affected population.
2. **Increased Security Presence:** The Federal Government should deploy a substantial number of security agents to all affected communities and areas. This increased presence is crucial to ensure the safety and protection of residents and could potentially encourage the displaced population to return to their villages and communities.
3. **Thorough Investigations and Accountability** A discreet investigation should be conducted to identify the sponsors, actors, routes, and modus operandi of the attackers. This information is vital for the success of any counter-terrorism strategy. In addition, those suspected of being complicit in the commission of these crimes must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, along with any in authority who stand accused of a grave dereliction of duty.
4. **Empowerment of Local Security Outfits:** Licensed weapons should be provided to local security outfits to enable them to respond promptly to distress calls prior to the arrival of federal security agents. This empowerment will enhance the capacity of local security forces in protecting their communities.
5. **Targeted Search Operations:** Comprehensive search operations should be conducted in locations and settlements suspected of harboring individuals with terrorist affiliations. This proactive approach is essential to disrupting and dismantling any terrorist networks in the state.
6. **Compensation and free medical services:** Compensation should be provided to the families of those who lost their lives in the attacks, and to those who have lost their livelihoods and homes. Additionally, free medical and psychosocial services should be extended to the injured to facilitate their recovery and alleviate their financial burden.

These recommendations are aimed at addressing the current situation and mitigating the ongoing challenges faced by the affected communities. Additional measures deemed necessary based on the prevailing circumstances should also be considered and implemented accordingly.

## APPENDIX I

### Confirmed Deaths in 25 of the Targeted Communities

|    | COMMUNITY      | LGA          | NO. OF PEOPLE KILLED |
|----|----------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 1  | Nisham         | Mangu/Bokkos | 17                   |
| 2  | Hurum          | Barkin Ladi  | 1                    |
| 3  | Darwat         | Barkin Ladi  | 7                    |
| 4  | NTV            | Barkin Ladi  | 9                    |
| 5  | Maiyanga       | Bokkos       | 12                   |
| 6  | Tahore         | Bokkos       | 23                   |
| 7  | Tuje           | Bokkos       | 3                    |
| 8  | Mutfet         | Bokkos       | 7                    |
| 9  | Ngyong         | Bokkos       | 5                    |
| 10 | Dares          | Bokkos       | 11                   |
| 11 | Chirang        | Bokkos       | 27                   |
| 12 | Fara           | Bokkos       | 2                    |
| 13 | Butura Kampani | Bokkos       | 5                    |
| 14 | Yelwan Nono    | Bokkos       | 2                    |
| 15 | Bodel          | Bokkos       |                      |
| 16 | Makarang       | Bokkos       | 8                    |
| 17 | Ndun           | Bokkos       | 1                    |
| 18 | Lung'ai        | Bokkos       | 1                    |
| 19 | Mbong          | Bokkos       | 15                   |
| 20 | Fiton          | Bokkos       | 8                    |
| 21 | Kwantu         | Bokkos       | 8                    |
| 22 | Mandarken      | Bokkos       | 2                    |
| 23 | Fasah          | Bokkos       | 2                    |
| 24 | Nghabok        | Bokkos       | 1                    |
| 25 | Waya           | Bokkos       | 1                    |

## APPENDIX II

*(Viewers' discretion advised)*



Mr James Makingat survived a gunshot following the attack on the Dares community in Bokkos LGA





COCIN LCC NDUN Church, Bokkos LGA



A burnt church in Mbong, Bokkos LGA





Survivors receiving treatment





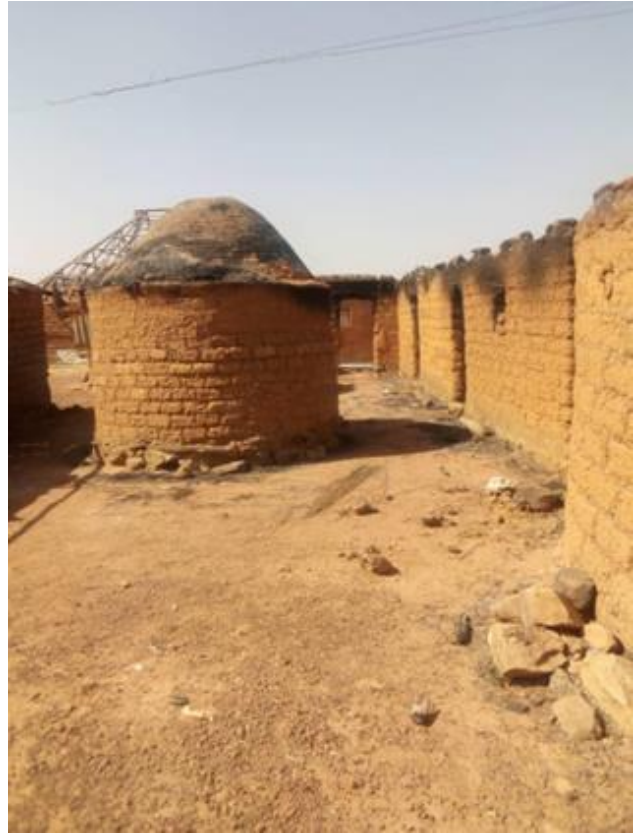
IDPs in BOKKOS LGA



Elder Samuel Mamot killed at Maiyanga Bokokos LGA



People fleeing their villages to cities because of fear attack













Nine Victims buried in Mass Grave at Maiyanga Bokkos LGA



