

Introduction

CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

We remain concerned by the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria. While the Nigerian Constitution states that the ‘security and welfare of the people’ are ‘the primary purpose of government’ (Article 14.2b, 14.2c), the country is increasingly under siege from a multiplicity of armed non-state actors.

The deadly advance of terrorist groups in Nigeria

In the north east, Boko Haram factions have been gaining ground since 2018, despite an official proclamation of their “technical defeat”. Boko Haram factions are currently reported to be in control of eight out of 10 local government areas (LGAs) in northern Borno State, and deadly attacks are occurring almost daily.

The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a breakaway faction of Boko Haram, has concentrated its attacks on security targets, Christians, and other targets deemed symbolic of the West or of the government. Utilising the Islamic State (IS) Takfiri ideology¹, ISWAP also murders fellow Muslims who work for aid agencies, are members of the security services or joint task forces, or live in villages where vigilante groups offer resistance.

The original faction led by Abubakar Shekau, continues indiscriminate violence, targeting schools, markets and houses of worship belonging to both major religions. January 2020 saw a resumption its use of young children, and particularly girls, as suicide bombers. Shekau has also secured the allegiance of armed bandits in northwest Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of Niger.

The area south of the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, has suffered multiple ambushes and attacks from these factions, particularly along the Damboa, Chibok, Biu, Michika, Gwoza and Madagali axis – an area populated by minority tribes, where villages are predominantly Christian. Since December 2019, villages along the Damaturu-Maiduguri road have been under sustained siege, and in January 2020, villagers from Auno, Jakana and Benisheik were reported to be fleeing Maiduguri in

large numbers to escape terrorist attacks. Maiduguri itself can no longer be approached by road safely.

Nigeria’s war on terror is now in its 11th year. The situation has been further complicated by the seeming re-emergence of the al Qaeda affiliate known as Ansuru. Ansuru broke away from Boko Haram in 2012, citing its indiscriminate actions which also killed fellow Muslims. Dormant since 2014, Ansaru claims to be seeking revenge for violence it alleged had been committed against Muslims in central Nigeria by what it called the “Christian” government led by former President Goodluck Jonathan, focusing on the abductions and killings of Westerners and of members of the security services. Ansaru claimed responsibility for an attack along the Kaduna Zaria highway on 14 January 2020, targeting the convoy of the Emir of Potiskum in Yobe State, in which around one hundred people were allegedly abducted and thirty killed, including four members of the Emir’s entourage.²

The exponential increase in militia violence

Violence perpetrated by an armed group comprising members of the Fulani ethnic group (also known as the Fulani militia) also threaten the security of lives and property in Nigeria. Attacks have been reported since March 2010, when close to 500 people were murdered in Dogo Nahawa, Zot and Ratsat villages in Plateau State by assailants using firearms and machetes, targeting women and children specifically.³ Attacks on non-Muslim communities elsewhere in Central Nigeria increased exponentially in 2015, as well-armed militia targeted farming communities in Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states, displacing tens of thousands. Attacks continue unabated, with assailants seemingly able to move at will from one state to another without interception.

There is a long history of disputes between nomadic herders and farming communities across the Sahel, occasioned by competition for land and water, and exacerbated by desertification, land encroachment and other factors. However, current attacks are occurring with such frequency, organisation, asymmetry and with sophisticated weaponry - including AK-47s and in some

¹ Deeming a follower of Islam an unbeliever (kafir) and no longer a Muslim

² Samuel Ogundipe, Premium Times Nigeria, ‘30 killed, 100 kidnapped as gunmen attack Emir of Potiskum’, 15 January 2020, [https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/3728_80-](https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/3728_80-30-killed-100-kidnapped-as-gunmen-attack-emir-of-potiskum.html)

[30-killed-100-kidnapped-as-gunmen-attack-emir-of-potiskum.html](https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/3728_80-30-killed-100-kidnapped-as-gunmen-attack-emir-of-potiskum.html)

³ The attacks in March 2010 were touted as retaliation for earlier events in Kuru Karama on 19 January, which was widely reported as a massacre of one hundred and fifty Muslim villagers.

cases chemicals and rocket launchers - that this nomenclature no longer suffices.

The violence has mutated into a deadly campaign with outworkings that increasingly reflect Nigeria's main religious fault line. Religion and ethnicity appear to be an effective rallying point for the militia. In the region, ethnicity generally correlates with religion; consequently, several observers have described these attacks as being part of a campaign of ethno-religious cleansing.

The failure of the state and federal governments to address this violence effectively and trace and penalise perpetrators, has entrenched impunity. Those who express concern or fault ineffective security are regularly threatened, detained arbitrarily and harassed judicially. In Kaduna State, journalists, activists, community leaders and even human rights defenders who highlight the situation in the south of the state are frequently subjected to arbitrary detention and/or judicial harassment.⁴

Inadequate official intervention to address ongoing violence by armed men of Fulani ethnicity in central Nigeria and a concomitant proliferation of small arms has caused a general rise in lawlessness, which terrorist factions based in the northeast increasingly exploit. Rural banditry that particularly targets Hausa Muslim villagers in northern Kaduna State, and in the north western states of Katsina, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara, has evolved from cattle rustling into a relentless cycle of murder, rape, abduction and extortion reminiscent of events in central Nigeria.

The Conflict Armament Research (CAR) traced weapons used during attacks in northern Kaduna, Zamfara and Katsina States to 'stockpiles of Nigerian defence and security forces.' Of 148 different weapons analysed, 'Nigerian-manufactured small-calibre ammunition — including cartridges manufactured as recently as 2014 — were the second-most prevalent type of ammunition in this data set'.⁵

Attacks are now occurring in the south of the country with increasing frequency. On 3 January Member of the House of Representatives, Shina Peller raised the alarm over incessant attacks by Fulani assailants on his constituents in Iganna, Iwajowa LGA, Oyo State.

Concerns over inadequate government action

The proliferation of armed non-state actors and continuing advances by the terrorist factions have led to protests and calls for an urgent and comprehensive overhaul of the leadership of Nigeria's security services.

Increasingly, frustration has also been voiced by soldiers themselves. Since 2018, video footage has emerged of soldiers allegedly leaving the battlefield or complaining of a lack of adequate and effective arms, or insufficient food or water due to corruption at higher levels. 2020 saw the mass resignation of 380 soldiers, 356 of whom cited their reasons as "loss of interest".

The government's seeming inability to deal decisively with terrorism in the north east, militia activity in the centre and south, armed banditry in the northwest and abductions for ransom nationwide is indicative of a catastrophic failure of the entire security structure, including in the areas of intelligence gathering, coordinated action between services, formulation of strategy and equipping of troops in a manner commensurate with diverse terrains.

In January 2021 President Buhari finally yielded to entreaties for the replacement of the service chiefs, who had been in place since 2015, and had presided over the nation's critical decline in security.

⁴ CSW, 'Submission to 126th Human Rights Committee, 18 June 2019, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/06/18/report/4368/article.htm>

⁵ Conflict Armament Research, 'Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Conflict, <https://www.conflictarm.com/>

Recommendations

To the Human Rights Council:

- Fully resource the armed forces as a matter of urgency, to ensure sufficient protection from terrorist factions to vulnerable communities regardless of the religion or ethnicity of their inhabitants, and to address the national security threat posed by the Fulani militia and armed banditry.
- Encourage governors of affected states to adequately provide for IDPs within their respective territories, including those sheltering in unofficial camps.
- Initiate an independent inquiry into collusion, inaction or the targeting of members of victim communities by military elements, and ensure the security forces conduct themselves in accordance with human rights and humanitarian norms.
- Enforce the rule of law at federal and state levels without bias, and end the use of security services to detain or otherwise harass citizens for peaceably expressing or espousing dissenting views, or for highlighting violations by state or non-state actors.
- Combat the proliferation of small arms and light weaponry by apprehending and disarming armed non-state actors, and prohibit the possession and use of such weapons by civilians who do not comply with the criteria outlined in Article 14 of the Economic Community of West African State's Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons.