

Communities in the predominantly Christian area of southern Kaduna state continue to experience kidnappings for ransom and attacks on their communities on an almost daily basis. This violence, perpetrated by an irregular armed faction, or militia, comprising of men of Fulani ethnicity, has been occurring in Plateau state since March 2010. Attacks on non-Muslim farming communities elsewhere in central states such as Kaduna have been ongoing since 2011 but increased exponentially in 2015, with the advent of the current administration.

Religion and ethnicity are either instrumentalised as a rallying point or are the *raison d'être* of these armed non state actors, who often seek to enforce an extremist interpretation of their creed. In a region where ethnicity generally correlates with religion, ethnic minorities are invariably also religious ones. Consequently, the attacks 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 environments.

A government gazette published in January 2022 designated such non-state actors operating in northwest Nigeria, who previously were vaguely referred to as “armed bandits”, as “terrorists”, extending this designation to “other similar groups” operating “in any part of Nigeria, especially in the North-West and North-Central Regions.”

Abduction, physical and psychological torture

During a November 2022 visit, CSW met individuals from several Southern Kaduna communities who were either victims of abduction or violence themselves or had experienced the trauma of losing loved ones or having to negotiate with kidnappers who had forcibly disappeared them following violent raids. These abductors begin by calling their victims’ families daily, insulting them, demanding extortionate sums from farming communities or families of limited means, and often stating they were calling to allow them to speak to their relatives “for the last time.” They then fail to call for days on end, leaving families tormented by fear that their loved ones may have been murdered.

Due to the arbitrary violence that occurs in camps in which abductees are held, payment of a ransom does not necessarily ensure their safe return. CSW was informed of several instances where captors received ransoms and said they would arrange the return of the abductee, then called families hours later to inform them their loved ones are dead. There are also many instances in which the person who brings the ransom payment is also seized and an even higher payment is subsequently demanded.

Families of abductees are often asked also to supply cigarettes, a specific quantity of marijuana (which is measured on arrival to ensure compliance), food, and large motorcycles known as ‘Boko Haram,’ because they are the favourite means of transport of the terrorist faction, which now also operates unhindered in the forests of Kaduna state. During their ordeal male captives are often bound by chains and padlocks, or their own torn garments, and blindfolded,

while some female abductees are forced to cook for their captors.

Once seized during raids on homes and establishments or attacks on villages, abductees are forcibly marched for over four hours through rough terrain as blows are rained on those who fall behind, until they reach an area where motorcycles transport them to the abductors’ camp. Most stated that during their stay in the camp they are barely fed and given stagnant water to drink, often “from the stream where they watered their animals,” which thirst compelled them to consume. All reported regularly being subjected to “merciless” assaults with sticks, fists, feet or gun handles; severe intimidation and psychological torture, including mock executions; threats of summary execution as assailants cocked and aimed guns at them; warnings of imminent execution, and having to witness frequent arbitrary killings. One former captive described how the assailants would ask new captives whether anyone wished to return to their homes, then execute anyone who answered yes.

A young male student who was abducted along with three room other students during an attack on a Christian college on 28 September in which one student was shot dead, recounted how the captors “dislocated” their legs when they reached the camp to prevent them from fleeing. They beat and tortured the students daily, cutting them with machetes: “We lost one of our colleagues because of torture, and I became very sick there. There was a day I became unconscious, and they thought I was dead. They were taking me away to dispose of my body, but my colleague pleaded with them after he saw my hand moving.” He was also subjected to a mock execution as a machete was pressed against his neck: “They killed so many people. I spent 24 days there, but it felt more like 24 years.”

A 31-year-old woman who was abducted along with her father and 21-year-old sister after terrorists broke into their home in Maraban Rido in Chikun Local Government Area (LGA) on 5 January 2022, informed CSW that as they were marched to the terrorists’ camp her father found the terrain increasingly difficult to negotiate as he was barefoot. As a result, he was beaten so severely that his ear became swollen, and he lost his hearing temporarily.

The woman was later released with instructions to find N20 million (approximately GBP £38,400) in ransom to ensure the survival and release of her father and sibling. She was one of many family members who spoke of their inability to sleep, the intense stress of anticipating, then receiving, the daily calls in which they are insulted by terrorists demanding money while assaulting their loved ones, and the terror that arose when they failed to call for several days, occasioning fears their loved ones may have been killed.

Her sister and father were eventually released following a ransom payment of N7 million (approximately GBP £13,400), but not before the kidnappers subjected her to further mind games by initially claiming the ransom was insufficient, before revealing later that they had already been released, and that her father would need a vehicle as his leg had swollen so severely that he could barely walk.

Rape

The situation for many communities of southern Kaduna can be described justifiably as an overlooked conflict, in which villagers patrol regularly with some carrying rudimentary weapons to protect their homes and crops to the best of their ability, hoping to provide early warnings to enable as many people as possible to escape death or abduction in attacks by well-armed, well-resourced militia men.

It is also an underreported conflict in which unknown numbers of female abductees have suffered the equivalent of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), having been traumatised by repeated rape while in captivity. Few victims speak openly of this aspect of their ordeal due to a residual stigma and deep, but unwarranted, feelings of shame. For this reason, the names and exact locations of the victims mentioned below have been withheld.

CSW was also informed of instances of male rape so severe that victims were hospitalised upon release and for a time were obliged “to wear pampers.” The extreme stigma surrounding male rape, and the deep humiliation and brokenness felt by victims mean that this trauma is even less spoken of than the rape of female captives.

A young mother who was abducted from her home along with her five-year-old daughter endured beatings, the mock hanging of her daughter which left the child with abrasions and bleeding to the neck, and eventually was raped repeatedly for a week, an ordeal that began when she was forced to walk to the area in the camp where bodies are dumped following summary executions, and she was told to say her last prayer prior to execution. At one stage her husband was tormented with a call in which he was informed that his wife “was now [their] new wife.”

The woman stated that in addition to enduring ongoing trauma from having been raped repeatedly, her greatest fear was that she may have contracted HIV from the rapists, and following the exorbitant ransom payment, the family was not in a position to pay for her to be tested and treated.

Another young woman who was also raped repeatedly while in captivity said her captors regularly threatened to sell her on to Boko Haram terrorists to be forcibly converted. Attempts were made to groom and desensitise her to committing arbitrary violence, including by forcing her to beat an elderly man with a stick. She grieved deeply over the continuing impact of the experience, which now causes her to react with physical violence to any male who comes too close to her, including those she knows, and to fly into previously uncharacteristic rages.

CSW was also informed of the case of a young woman who was repeatedly raped by her captors and was pregnant when she returned home. She increasingly withdrew from friends and even family members, refusing to eat as her pregnancy progressed and becoming increasingly weak. She died while giving birth to the child.

Psychological torture and intimidation continue post-release

Survivors and their families informed CSW that their former captors continue to call them once released, with the same mobile phone numbers that were used during negotiations. Sometimes they are asked how they are doing; on other occasions, they are asked where they have gone, and are ordered to return to their homes. The attackers have even been known to forewarn former captives of imminent raids in their areas, telling them to leave their homes to avoid being recaptured since they have already paid ransoms. One survivor disclosed that the latest call she had received from her abductors came two days before meeting with CSW.

When asked if they report such calls to authorities, several victims angrily pointed out that the authorities offer them no protection, and that since their abductors know where they live and even appear to know when they are not at home, thanks to unknown informants who work with them, they will exact a terrible revenge for any perceived ‘betrayal’: “Reporting to them is like implicating yourself. They know what is happening.”

One man spoke of how he had moved from the house where he was abducted following his release, and almost immediately had received the first of three calls from an abductor asking him why he was no longer at his home. When he said he had sold the house, he was ordered to return there or face the abduction of family members. He reported the threats to the local police, asking and expecting them to send security to the area. However, they informed him they could not, and he was forced to return to the house to ensure his family’s safety.

Thus, in the absence of official protection, victims have been terrorised not only into silence, but also into obeying their tormenters.

Religious aspect to abductions

There is a distinct religious aspect to the current violence in Southern Kaduna.

Several former abductees recounted that upon arriving at their assailants’ camp, any Muslims found to have been caught up in violent raids are released without having to pay ransom and returned to their homes on motorcycles.

Christian leaders, their families, and congregations are particularly targeted for abduction for ransom, and even execution.

During the November visit, CSW spoke with a parent whose son is amongst 44 members of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Kasuwan Magani in Kajuru LGA who were abducted from an all-night service during the evening of 12-13 September, and whose captors demanded N22 million (approximately GBP £42,200) in ransom. The abductees included a two-year-old and nine children aged around 11. The rest of the abductees were aged 50 and under. Half of the abductees were released following significant ransom payments, including at least one payment of N5,800,000

(GBP £11,100) after which 14 people were released, including the younger children. The children who were released described efforts by their captors to forcibly convert them by pressurising them, unsuccessfully, to recite the Muslim declaration of faith (Shahada).

Seven more people were subsequently released. However, at the time of the CSW visit in early November, 22 members of the church were still in the hands of the terrorists, including the man's son.

On 8 November, Rev Fr Abraham Kunat, Parish Priest of St Bernard Catholic Church Idon Gida was abducted at around 12.30am from St Mulumba, Kurmin Sara in Kachia LGA, where he had been residing due to the critical security situation in the region.

On 15 July 2022, Rev Fr John Mark Cheitnum, chairperson of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Jema'a LGA and the coordinating chairperson of the body for Southern Kaduna, and Rev Fr Donatus Cleopas of Christ the King Catholic Church in Kafanchan, Jema'a LGA, were abducted. While Rev Fr Cleopas managed to escape his captors, on 19 July the body of Rev Fr Cheitnum was found in farmland. It later transpired he was killed on the day of his abduction. Rev Fr Cheitnum had been a vocal advocate for the vulnerable communities of southern Kaduna. Following his death, a fellow vocal advocate, clergyman and friend received threatening call informing him that he would suffer the same fate if he continued speaking about the plight of the people of southern Kaduna. This clergyman is currently planning to relocate from the state to safeguard his family.

Prior to the murder of Rev Fr Cheitnum, Rev Fr Vitus Borogo was killed during a terrorist raid on his farm on 25 June.

Militia attacks

CSW also met with villagers who had survived militia attacks on their communities which did not always include abductions but always involved the killing of villagers and destruction of livestock, crops and homes.

A woman from Dogon Noma village in Kajuru LGA, said to CSW: "I have cried and cried; I am just tired." During an attack on her village in 2019 she initially fled the assailants alongside her sister, but they decided to split up to ensure that at least one of them survived. As she was running, she was shot in the back and fell. Her assailants picked her up, placed her in a room in a house, and held a discussion before cutting off the fingers of her right hand apart from her thumb and index finger, and cutting her leg to prevent her from escaping. She lost consciousness and awoke in hospital, where she stayed for several months before being discharged, but was obliged to return periodically for her wounds to be dressed.

Her house was burnt to the ground by the attackers: "the only thing I had left were the clothes I was wearing." Her husband, who was injured during the attack, had been taken to the same hospital. Her sister, who also survived, was later among 21 people abducted during a subsequent attack in June 2022, in which 29 people were killed in five communities

by militia men who were assisted by a [helicopter](#) that fired on people from neighbouring villages who sought to assist. Her sister was released two months later but remains traumatised by her experience in the camp.

A mother of two, also from Dogon Noma, lost her forearm in the 2019 militia attack. She was nine months pregnant at the time and was awakened at around 6pm by the sound of people screaming and running: "The herdsmen had surrounded the town and were killing and shooting. I put my youngest child on my back and prepared to run, but before I knew what was happening, they had cut off my arm and killed one of my children, the five-year-old." She also received a machete blow to the face, exposing her teeth, was stabbed, was shot twice, and an attempt was made to cut through the back of her neck. "While all of this was happening, a helicopter was hovering, and it left when they left."

Seventy-six people were killed in the village that day. When the attackers withdrew, she was lying unconscious next to her injured two-year-old. So severe were her injuries that she was placed among the dead bodies for burial, while her child was transported to hospital and survived. Fortunately, someone noticed her making a slight movement, and she too was rushed to hospital, where she immediately went into labour, giving birth to a baby who died two days later.

The community fled the village but returned after a lengthy period, assuming peace had been restored. However, in 2022 the village was attacked once again. This time the assailants rode in on motorcycles, which were also used to carry away abductees.

These cases are emblematic of others in which women have suffered deliberate amputation and highlight an unpleasant trend. Women are significantly involved in farming activities, and the amputations appear to be aimed at preventing them from undertaking this work, thereby ensuring an insufficient harvest. This, coupled with the regular tactic of destroying crops, looting, and destroying foodstuffs and stealing or killing livestock, is ensuring the emergence of a hunger gap that will become particularly acute by 2023, while also rendering targeted farming communities increasingly destitute.

Villagers threatened with execution

CSW was informed by survivors that the inhabitants of Ungwan Gamo, Dogon Noma and Maikori villages in the Maro Ward of Kajuru LGA – three of five communities attacked in [June 2022](#), have been warned by militia men that once any of them are kidnapped, they will not demand any ransom, but will instead "take their lives." Consequently, people from these villages are obliged to avoid taking the main route when travelling to market, as it is a hot spot for kidnapping and seizure of motorcycles.

Additionally, women from these villages no longer stay there, but live in small safe shelters in the bush, only returning from time to time to collect necessary items. According to one of the villagers: "We do not sleep with our eyes closed; we take a nap, then wake up and keep watch." He added that

in the absence of effective security, “we are just depending on the grace of God.”

Government complicit, or simply missing in action?

Despite being the headquarters of 11 military installations, Kaduna state has become an epicentre of kidnapping, consistently ranking among the top three most insecure states in the country. By the [government's own figures](#), 804 Kaduna state residents were kidnapped between 1 July to September 2022, with 508 of these cases recorded in the Kaduna Central Senatorial District, an area which includes the Chikun, Kaduna South and Kajuru LGAs of southern Kaduna. The Southern Kaduna Peoples Union (SOKAPU) is [quoted](#) as stating that over 100 Christians were abducted in September 2022 alone.

Persistent allegations of a helicopter assisting armed non state actors as they during attacks, and the abiding lack of security for vulnerable communities, even after repeated attacks, are a source of additional and considerable concern and merit urgent investigation.

Nigeria's Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) registration initiative requires all mobile phone subscribers to register their SIM cards with their mobile network operators and was heralded as a means of enhancing security. However, the authorities are yet to trace any of the calls made by abductors to their freed victims on the same lines that were used for ransom negotiations, let alone arrest any of the perpetrators.

Furthermore, several former captives insist the authorities already know the location of camps, saying army helicopters often hovered over the area where they were being held before moving away to bomb an empty area. Several interpreted this as an attempt by the authorities to give the impression of addressing insecurity, when in reality nothing is being done, while the communities of southern Kaduna remain as vulnerable as ever. Conversely, those seeking to defend their villages from attack are regularly disarmed and arrested, with many young men held in lengthy pre-trial detention. CSW was informed that several youth from Kajuru LGA detained in 2019 along with Elders from the indigenous [Adara tribe](#) who were falsely accused of stoking communal violence, are yet to be released.

Conclusion and recommendations

The abiding narrative of the crisis in southern Kaduna constituting a communal conflict between farmers and herders occasioned by climate change and competition for resources, such as land and water, which is still favoured by many in the international community has not only been rendered obsolete by its evolution, which now includes the

presence in the area of recognised terrorist factions; it has also prevented any meaningful international interventions or representations to the Nigerian state or federal governments to ensure assistance for communities that essentially remain defenceless. The human costs of the insistence on this outdated narrative include the remorseless loss of lives and damaged psyches of targeted southern Kaduna communities.

The muted response, both locally and internationally, to the death, destruction and displacement occurring in southern Kaduna is both lamentable and unacceptable. Communities indigenous to the area are under constant and increasing threat, and the finances of Christian communities, churches and families are haemorrhaging due to repeated payments of exorbitant ransoms. Additionally, thousands of men, women and children are severely and often repeatedly traumatised in a manner which increasingly militates against the eventual emergence of reconciliation and genuine social cohesion. It is time for the recognition of the severity of the situation in the area at state, federal and international level.

It is also time for urgent interventions to ensure protection for civilians from targeted communities in line with Section 14 (2) (b) of Nigeria's 1999 constitution (as amended), which states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.”

Given the designation of the groups behind the abductions and killings as terrorist, and their increasing links with terrorist factions from the northeast which have also relocated to the forests of Kaduna state, the government of Kaduna State and the Federal Government must be encouraged to resource and mandate the security services, enabling them not only to tackle the perpetrators comprehensively, but also to provide immediate and effective protection for communities whose plight has been neglected for far too long.

The situation in southern Kaduna is one of many indications that the Nigerian state is failing progressively, a failure due in no small part to official negligence. Recent extensive travel warnings issued by both the UK and US governments and the evacuations of embassy staff and foreign companies are indications of the seriousness of Nigeria's current plight, which warrants the convening of a special session at the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the mandating of a fact-finding mission to investigate violence that is now affecting civilians of all creeds and ethnicities and poses an existential threat to the nation.

**CSW everyone
free to believe**

T +44 (0)20 8329 0010

🐦 @CSW_UK

f /CSWUK

csw.org.uk

PO Box 99

New Malden

Surrey, KT3 3YF

United Kingdom

© Copyright CSW 2022. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, photocopying, mechanical, recording and/or otherwise without the prior written permission of CSW.