

Introduction

In January, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria travelled to the United Kingdom (UK) to lead the Nigerian delegation attending the UK-Africa Investment Summit on 20 January. Nigeria was one of 21 countries at the summit and the only nation to attend every event during the gathering.

The fact that the first summit held by the newly elected UK government was Africa-focused was described by the UK's High Commissioner to Nigeria, Catriona Laing, as being illustrative of the fact that the UK perceives "huge opportunities in Africa" and will be "looking to strengthen and deepen" ties with the continent in the post-Brexit era.

The High Commissioner also saw the summit as an important opportunity "to build prosperity and economic ties," and inspire investors, encouraging them to go beyond Lagos and Abuja – Nigeria's commercial and federal capitals – and into states offering investments opportunities, with Plateau State receiving particular commendation for the manner in which it is marketing itself for potential investors. The sole drawback to investment envisaged by High Commissioner Laing was corruption, which she stressed was being addressed by the current government and described as circumnavigable.

While corruption remains a prevalent, and significant, hindrance to investment and development in Nigeria, it has for some time been superseded by insecurity, which is rising in every part of the nation. The country is experiencing an unprecedented level of lawlessness that is negatively impacting the lives of citizens throughout the country, regardless of their social standing. It is exacerbated by corruption, as security elements are sometimes involved.

The deterioration of the security situation is relentless. The current state of affairs is perhaps best captured by activist Aisha Yesufu, who has described the lack of security and ongoing loss of life as "heart-breaking [...] yesterday's victims were once survivors. Today's victims were yesterday's survivors and tomorrow's victims would be today's survivors."

Worse still, the issue – which is yet to be addressed adequately by the government – is exacerbated by what some have termed the politicisation of the security forces, particularly when the army usurped the role assigned by law to the police force during the 2019 elections. There are persistent complaints that the President has disregarded the Federal Character Provision, which was enshrined in the country's Constitution in 1979 and reiterated in the 1999 Constitution, which seeks to ensure that appointments to public service institutions reflect the country's linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic diversity, with a view towards building and uniting the nation.

"No one could have imagined that in winning the Presidency, General Buhari would bring nepotism and clannishness into the military and the ancillary Security Agencies, that his government would be marked by supremacist and divisive policies that would push our country to the brink. This President has displayed the greatest degree of insensitivity in managing our country's rich diversity. He has subordinated the larger interests of the country to the hegemonic interests of his coreligionists and clansmen and women."¹

Terrorism: Boko Haram, ISWAP and the return of Ansaru

As he travelled to the UK seeking investment opportunities, President Buhari left behind a country wracked by unprecedented insecurity, amidst growing criticism from civilians and politicians alike, who are increasingly under siege from a multiplicity of armed non-state actors.

In the north east, factions of the terrorist organisation Boko Haram have been gaining ground since 2018, claiming the lives of more soldiers than at the height of the conflict in 2014, despite official proclamations of the "technical defeat" of Boko Haram in 2015.

The Boko Haram factions are currently reported to be in control of 8 out of 10 local government areas (LGAs) in northern Borno State, and deadly attacks are occurring almost daily.²

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad,³ led by Abubakar Shekau, continues its indiscriminate violence,

¹ Matthew Hassan Kukah, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, founder of the Kukah Centre (a think tank with focus on faith and public policy), cited in: Evelyn Okakwu, Premium Times Nigeria, '(FULL SPEECH): What Bishop Kukah said about Buhari, Insecurity, others', 12 February 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/376995-full-speech-what-bishop-kukah-said-about-buhari-insecurity-others.html>

² Dionne Searcey, The New York Times, 'Boko Haram is Back. With Better Drones', 13 September 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/13/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram.html>;

Shola Oyeyipo, All Africa, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram Controls Eight Borno LGs-Lawmakers', 25 September 2019,

<https://allafrica.com/stories/201909250693.html>

³ "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad"

including the targeting of schools, civilians and houses of worship belonging to both major religions. January 2020 saw a resumption in its practice of using young children, and particularly girls, as suicide bombers. In late January, two girls blew themselves up at a mosque in Gwoza, Borno State, killing a 12-year-old boy and injuring 14 people.⁴ Four days later a girl aged no more than 12 detonated a bomb in an open-air Islamic seminary on the outskirts of Maiduguri, killing three boys. Earlier, another young girl had exploded her bomb inside a house in the neighbourhood, killing only herself.⁵

Meanwhile, the breakaway Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has maintained the focus prescribed by Boko Haram's late founder, Mohammed Yusuf, who concentrated on attacking security targets, Christians and other targets deemed symbolic of the West or of the government.

In line with the Islamic State (IS) Takfiri ideology,⁶ ISWAP murders fellow Muslims only if they are deemed to have strayed from the faith, or are members of the security services or civilian joint task forces, or live in villages with vigilantes groups that offer resistance. For example, in September and October 2018 respectively, ISWAP executed International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) employee Saifura Hussein Ahmed and UNICEF worker Hauwa Mohammed Liman, having declared the 25-year-old midwives Takfir. In the video depicting Ms Liman's execution, an ISWAP spokesperson stated: "for us there is no difference between the Red Cross and UNICEF. If we see them we kill the apostate among them, men or women, and choose to kill or keep the infidels as slaves, men or women."⁷

During the 2019 Christmas period, these factions of Boko Haram appeared to vie for international headlines. Throughout this period, the area south of the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, experienced the majority of ambushes and attacks, particularly along the Damboa, Chibok, Biu, Michika, Gwoza and Madagali axis. 'It is pertinent to note that the peoples in this area are from minority tribes (Babur, Kibaki etc.), many of the villages are Christian and that a major uptick in attacks in the southern axis began around

the 20th of December with over 20 attacks and ambushes up until the first week of January.'⁸

On 22 December 2019, ISWAP attacked two passenger buses on Munguno road in Borno State. Muslim passengers were released, while the Christians were held back and separated by gender. Three men, including a pastor from the Deeper Life Bible Church, were killed on the spot. The group subsequently abducted: the pastor's female relative, Hannatu Sabastin Ishaya; Jennifer Ukambong Samuel and Asabe Cletus Musa, who work for Action for International Medical Alliance (ALIMA); Solidarity International employee Arthur Ibojekwe China, and two private security guards who survived by pretending to work for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Red Cross. All 5 were released following negotiations involving ALIMA and Solidarity international. It remains unclear whether a ransom was paid.⁹

On 23 December 2019, ISWAP killed several people when it attacked the outskirts of the Yobe State capital, Damaturu, for the third time in two months,¹⁰ as well as Biu town in southern Borno State, using rocket-propelled grenades.

Not to be outdone, the Shekau faction attacked Kwarangulum village, situated 10 miles from Chibok, on Christmas Eve, killing at least five people, injuring three and abducting five. On the same day, two people were killed and around 12 injured on the outskirts of Biu during the second ISWAP attack on the area in less than 24 hours.

The beheadings of 10 Christians and shooting of one Muslim briefly attracted international attention, after a video clip of the executions was released by ISWAP to coincide with Christmas Day. On the same day, Shekau released a video in which he reiterated threats against Nigeria's Christian community and Muslims espousing liberal views, and disputed the divinity of Christ. Then on Boxing Day, bride-to-be Martha Bulus, her sister and the rest of her 55-strong wedding party were intercepted at Gwoza, as they travelled from Maiduguri to Adamawa where the wedding was due to take place on 31 December, and beheaded. Then on 29

⁴ Seun Adeyeye, Pulse, 'Boko Haram bombs mosque in Borno', 26 January 2020 [Seun Adeyeye, Pulse, 'Boko Haram bombs mosque in Borno'](https://www.pulse.ng/news/boko-haram-bombs-mosque-in-borno-2020-01-26), 26 January 2020 <https://www.pulse.ng/news/boko-haram-bombs-mosque-in-borno-2020-01-26>

⁵ Aliyu Muhammed, 'Borno suicide bombing: 12-year-old girl kills three, injures four', 31 January 2020 <http://insidesthearea.com.ng/borno-suicide-bombing-12-year-old-girl-kills-three-injures-four/>

⁶ Deeming a follower of Islam an unbeliever (kafir) and no longer a Muslim.

⁷ CSW, 'Boko Haram Executes Second Female Hostage', 16 October 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/10/16/press/4119/article.htm>; Olayinka Shehu, International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 'ISWAP executes four abducted Action Against

Humanity workers, says FG not sincere', 13 December 2019, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/iswap-executes-fourabducted-action-against-hunger-workers-says-fg-notsincere/>

⁸ Vox Peccavi, 'Boko Haram ISWAPs Christmas 2019 Offensive', 13 February 2020, <https://peccaviconsulting.wordpress.com/2020/02/13/bok%20o-haram-iswaps-christmas-2019-offensive/>

⁹ CSW, 'Released hostage reports that Leah Sharibu is alive and well', 20 January 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/20/press/4528/article.htm>

¹⁰ The first of these attacks on Yola occurred a matter of weeks after a CSW team had visited the city in October 2019.

December, 17 people from Chibok were abducted from Mandragrau in Bui LGA.

On the evening of 2 January 2020, Rev Lawan Andimi, the chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Adamawa State, was abducted by fighters from the Shekau faction of Boko Haram, who were dressed in military fatigues and descended on Michika town in Adamawa State in a convoy of vehicles and ransacked the town for food and valuables. He was beheaded on 20 January, even as negotiations for his release were ongoing.¹¹ "It is unclear if there was ever a plan to release him, or the negotiations were designed to heighten the impact of his murder."¹² The day after a particularly gory video of the Reverend's execution had been released, ISWAP released a video of the execution of 22-year-old student, Ropvil Daciya Dalep, by a prepubescent male terrorist armed with a pistol.¹³

Mr Daciya had been abducted on 9 January on the outskirts of the Borno State capital along with 20-year-old zoology student Lilian Daniel Gyang, also from Plateau State, when the terrorists intercepted the vehicle in which they were travelling. Both were returning to university following the Christmas holiday. A third person who was abducted alongside them was later released. Nothing more has been heard of Ms Gyang since her abduction. In a speech delivered just before shooting Mr Ropvil, the child terrorist made it clear that he was being targeted because of his religion and state of origin:

"In particular, this is one among the Christians from Plateau State. We are saying to Christians, we have not forgotten what you have done to our parents and ancestors and we are telling all Christians around the world, we have not forgotten and will not stop. We must avenge the bloodshed that has been done like this one..."

The Boko Haram factions appear to have gained more ground since being driven out of territories they occupied in the lead up to the 2015 elections. Since December 2019,

villages along the Damaturu-Maiduguri road have been under sustained siege, and in January 2020, villagers from the surrounding areas Auno, Jakana and Benisheik were reported to be fleeing the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, in large numbers to escape terrorist attacks.

Far from providing a safe haven, Maiduguri itself remains under siege and can no longer be approached by road safely. On 17 January 2020, Boko Haram disconnected Maiduguri and surrounding areas from the national electricity grid for the second time since June 2019.¹⁴ On the evening of 18 January, an entire section of the United Nations' (UN's) major humanitarian facility in Ngala was burned, along with several vehicles in a violent and sustained attack.¹⁵ Seventeen soldiers were reportedly killed and an unknown number kidnapped in attacks along Bama-Gwoza road on 17 and 18 January.¹⁶

More recently, at least 30 people, including a pregnant woman and a baby, were burnt to death on 9 February as they slept in their vehicles during a 45 minute attack on Auno village, situated 25 kilometres away Maiduguri.¹⁷ The travellers had parked to observe a curfew that prevented them from proceeding to Maiduguri. The insurgents were also reported to have abducted several women and children,¹⁸ and to have conducted house to house searches during which they looted and killed occupants at will.¹⁹

The attack was the sixth on Auno village since June 2019. Upon visiting the village the day after the violence, the governor of Borno State, Babagana Zulum, accused the military of failing to protect the stranded travelers and pleaded for soldiers to re-establish a base there: "The fact is that we have made several attempts for the Nigeria military to establish their unit in Auno but nothing was done. As soon

¹¹ CSW, 'Boko Haram executes chair of Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa State', 21 January 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/21/press/4530/article.htm>

¹² Vox Peccavi, 'Boko Haram ISWAPs Christmas 2019 Offensive'.

¹³ CSW, 'ISWAP child terrorist executes Christian student', 23 January 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/23/press/4533/article.htm>

¹⁴ Governance News, 'Boko Haram disconnects Maiduguri from national grid', 21 January 2020, <https://governancenews.com.ng/2020/01/21/boko-haramdisconnects-maiduguri-from-national-grid/>

¹⁵ United Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Nigeria: UN condemns attack humanitarian hub', 20 January 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/story/nigeriaun-condemns-attack-humanitarian-hub%20%20>

¹⁶ Punch Nigeria, '17 soldiers killed, scores abducted in fresh Boko Haram attack', 20 January 2020, [Punch Nigeria, '17 soldiers killed, scores](https://punchng.com/17-soldiers-killed-scores-abducted-in-fresh-boko-haram-attack/)

[abducted in fresh Boko Haram attack', 20 January 2020, https://punchng.com/17-soldiers-killed-scores-abducted-in-fresh-boko-haram-attack/](https://punchng.com/17-soldiers-killed-scores-abducted-in-fresh-boko-haram-attack/)

¹⁷ Abdulkareem Haruna, Premium Times Nigeria, 'Furious Borno governor blames military for Boko Haram massacre of over 30 travellers, 10 February 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/37677-9-furious-borno-governor-blames-military-for-boko-haram-massacre-of-30-travellers.html>

¹⁸ BBC, 'Nigeria militants burn to death motorists as they sleep in their cars', 10 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-51445070>

¹⁹ Ibrahim Sawab, Daily Trust, 'B/Haram fighters kill 30 stranded travellers in Borno', 11 February 2020, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/b-haram-fighters-kill-30-stranded-travellers-in-borno.html>

as it is 5 o'clock and they closed up their gate, they abandon the people and move over to Maiduguri.”²⁰

Nigeria's war on terror is now in its 11th year and it has been complicated further by the apparent re-emergence of an al Qaeda affiliate that had been dormant since 2014. Jamā'atu Anṣārīl Muslimīna fī Bilādis Sūdān (JAMBS), also known as Ansuru, broke away from Boko Haram in 2012, citing its indiscriminate actions which resulted in the killing of fellow Muslims. Instead, Ansaru claimed to be seeking revenge for the violence that it alleged had been committed against Muslims in central Nigeria by what it called the “Christian” government led by former President Goodluck Jonathan. It focused on the abductions and killings of Westerners and of members of the security services.

Ansaru remerged from a six-year hiatus to claim responsibility for an attack along the KadunaZaria highway targeting the convoy of the Emir of Potiskum in Yobe State on 14 January, in which some one hundred people were allegedly abducted and thirty were killed, including four members of the Emir's entourage.²¹

Military morale in the North East

The governor and civilians are not the only ones expressing dissatisfaction with current military tactics: increasingly frustration is being voiced by soldiers themselves, who express particular dissatisfaction with the top brass of the military. 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.²² ‘The government allocates the equivalent of nearly \$80 million each quarter to the war effort, and yet Nigerian soldiers lack ample ammunition and medical care — leaving many residents to ask where all the money is going. Earlier [in 2019] in Rann, where there is no lighting after sundown, disgruntled soldiers without night vision gear abandoned their posts, according to several aid workers.’²³

Morale was particularly sapped during the summer of 2018, when reuyj surgent Boko Haram factions began to inflict

significant casualties on ill-equipped military outposts. For example, in July 2018, soldiers were killed in attacks in Jillī in Yobe State and Bama in Borno State. In August, 17 soldiers were reportedly killed in an attack on a military base in Borno, during which the arsenal was looted. On 7 September, soldiers and civilians were killed when the sect overran, looted and briefly raised their flag over Gudumbali Town in Borno. On 16 September, terrorists ambushed the troops of 222 Battalion, but were fought off after a “serious exchange of gunfire.”²⁴ By 2019, the Nigerian government was forced to deny press reports that it had conducted secret burials of up to 1,000 soldiers who had been killed since the upsurge in terrorist activity began,²⁵ while comments proliferated on social media regarding the conspicuous increase of soldiers with southern names in publicised death tolls.

The following testimonies from soldiers provide a worrying indication of existing dissatisfaction:

“Troops are demoralised. Our fighting spirit has been weakened and sometimes troops flee as soon as the terrorists launch an attack without putting any resistance. Soldiers are not given the right equipment to fight the terrorists. Of course, they are given new assault rifles but it takes more than a rifle to face and crush a well-armed terrorist group like ISWAP. Most of the heavy weapons including tanks and other artillery equipment we use are old and don't properly work. They were only refurbished. They jam, fail or overheat when they are fired during encounters with the terrorists, when they attack military bases. This leaves our soldiers with no option but to abandon the bases and flee. The fleeing by soldiers emboldens the terrorists who interpret the withdrawal as sign of cowardice. This encourages them to escalate attacks, knowing they are not likely to face much resistance.”

- Military Officer

“There is lack of coordination between ground troops and the air force. On many instances air support hardly comes when ground forces come under attack. This gives the terrorists who

²⁰ Haruna Umar, AP News, ‘Nigeria governor pleads for military's help after 30 killed’, 11 February 2020, https://apnews.com/ef5136cd9814319535e63d35eace1dd4?utm_source=Media+Review+for+February+11%2C+2020&utm_campaign=Media+Review+for+February+11%2C+2020&utm_medium=email

²¹ Samuel Ogundipe, Premium Times Nigeria, ‘30 killed, 100 kidnapped as gunmen attack Emir of Potiskum’, 15 January 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/372880-30-killed-100-kidnapped-as-gunmen-attack-emir-ofpotiskum.html>

²² DW News, ‘Nigerian soldiers grow desperate in fight against Boko Haram’, 28 November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bvfj-G3zdOA>

²³ Dionne Searcey, The New York Times, ‘Boko Haram is Back. With Better Drones.’

²⁴ CSW, ‘Nigeria: Hostage executed, others threatened by Boko Haram’, 18 September 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/09/18/press/4072/article.htm>

²⁵ MSN, The Punch, ‘Controversy over alleged secret burial of 1,000 soldiers’, 2 August 2019, <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/africa/nigeria/controversyover-alleged-secret-burial-of-1000-soldiers/ar-AAFdGEn>

attack in huge numbers and firing heavy artillery on bases an advantage. As long as the war strategy doesn't change, we are not likely to see any remarkable progress in this war against these enemies of humanity. Our strategy is largely defensive instead of combative. Soldiers are camped in bases fortified with trenches and mines. They hardly take the fight to the terrorists but only wait for the terrorists attack for them to try to repel them. We have lost a lot of lethal military equipment to these terrorists which they use to fight us. Soldiers work on superior orders.

Troops can only leave their bases and launch operations on orders. We can't leave the base without an order."

- **Soldier**

"Soldiers are in some cases reluctant to put in their best in battle against Boko Haram terrorists for fear of being killed or wounded. They have seen how their injured colleagues have been neglected and how the families of their fallen comrades have been abandoned and their benefits not paid. This discourages some of us from fighting like soldiers because they don't want to end up like their unlucky colleagues. Our superiors don't care about our welfare and we are usually owed allowances. A lot of us are warweary. We have been in the war zone for too long and are fatigued. We have lost the zeal to fight. This is the truth."

- **Soldier²⁶**

In an effort to offset the rising death toll, the Nigerian Army introduced a new strategy entailing the concentration of fighting forces in strongholds called 'Super Camps'. While the Super Camp concept has indeed reduced the potential for military casualties and theft by terrorists of weaponry and materials, it has also reduced the army's ability to combat the insurgents in rural areas and increased the vulnerability of these communities. Super Camps also depend heavily on patrolling, which exposes troops to threats from improvised explosive devices and renders them vulnerable to ambushes.²⁷

'Losing troops unnecessarily is clearly unsustainable, but the British Army's experience of Platoon Houses in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, has shown that well trained, well led troops with good fire support and logistics can defend small, far flung bases. In Nigeria's case the Super Camp concept can only be a short term stop gap (if the Government ever truly wishes to eliminate Boko Haram); until the hinterlands are re-occupied with better planned, defended and resourced bases and/or deploying, highly mobile, flexible and heavily armed troops to dominate the ground.'²⁸

Abductions for ransom

The terrorist factions are not the only threats to the security of lives and property. 'In recent years, [abduction or kidnapping for ransom] has increasingly been used by criminals in the Fulani nomadic communities of the country's north.'²⁹ Nigeria reportedly now has one of the highest kidnap for ransom rates in Africa targeting both foreigners and nationals, with kidnapping gangs operating in each of its 36 states, including the federal capital, Abuja.

Abduction for ransom, which in the past occurred primarily in the oil rich Niger Delta area, is now rife across the country. While kidnappings in that region involved and occasionally still involve the targeting of government and oil companies, the current spate of kidnappings are notable for the random targeting of civilians regardless of their wealth or social status. These abductions are also characterised by efforts 'to maximise ransom payments through a high-volume, rapid settlement strategy, moving quickly from one victim to the next.'³⁰ They include demands for inflated ransoms that can sometimes be bargained down; the severe mistreatment of victims, often during a telephone conversation with relatives to increase pressure for payments; and execution without hesitation if monies are not forthcoming, or are not sent in a timely manner.

In September 2019, the daughter of a leading opposition politician was released after her father was made to pay US\$ 15,000 in bitcoins, illustrating the pervasiveness and increasing sophistication of this enterprise, although the main perpetrator was later arrested in this instance.³¹ According to Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) and Commander of Intelligence Response Team, Abba Kyari,

Offensive', 13 February 2020

<https://peccaviconsulting.wordpress.com/2020/02/13/boko-haram-iswaps-christmas-2019-offensive/>

²⁹ The Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/99d6aaea-e394-11e9-9743db5a370481bc>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Today News Africa, 'First bitcoin ransom in Nigeria leads to arrest of suspected kidnapper', 22 October 2019, https://todaynewsafrika.com/first-bitcoin-ransom-in-nigeria-leads-to-arrest-of-kidnapper/?doing_wp_cron=1581517506.6931290626525878906250

²⁶ Testimonies provided to Agence France Presse (AFP) on condition of anonymity.

Naharnet Newsdesk, 'Demoralized, Terrified, Nigerian Soldiers Face Jihadists', 20 June 2019, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/261711>

²⁷ Report by SBM, cited in Timileyin Omilana, The Guardian Nigeria, 'Super camps make Nigerian Army 'less nimble' against terrorists - Report', 7 October 2019, <https://guardian.ng/news/super-camps-make-nigerianarmy-less-nimble-against-terrorists-report/>

²⁸ Vox Peccavi, 'Boko Haram ISWAPs Christmas 2019

kidnappers are also using encrypted communication for ransom negotiations including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, roaming numbers and jammers to prevent the tracking of their phones. The DCP also suggested that drones and attack helicopters are being used in remote and inaccessible areas, such as the “Kaduna, Kogi, Niger and Zamfara forest, which is currently being occupied by gangs of Fulani kidnappers.”³²

Kidnappers seize people on the streets, they also break into homes or enter villages and take people at gunpoint. However, the majority of abductions for ransom occur on the nation's roads where kidnappers, often dressed in military attire, mount fake roadblocks, ambush passing vehicles or attack congested areas. Most of Nigeria's commercial goods are transported by road, and kidnapping gangs have turned road travel into a dangerous exercise. ‘The Abuja-Kaduna highway — one of the country's most important commercial thoroughfares, leading from the capital to the vast northern market — has become Ground Zero for the scourge of kidnapping. The spread of kidnapping has thrown up an additional security challenge for businesses in a country with no shortage of them.’³³

During visits to Kaduna state in 2019, CSW confirmed reports that many traders and other travelers were abandoning the road in favour of the Abuja-Kaduna train system, which was inaugurated in 2018.³⁴ According to some reports, even high-ranking army officials would take the train while their hapless chauffeurs were obliged to drive the vehicles and meet up with them later. However, in late 2019, kidnapping gangs began to target the Rigasa area on the outskirts of the Kaduna State capital, where the train from Abuja terminates, which has prompted protests from the local community. Speaking to Nigerian media in November 2019, a Rigasa resident complained that 50 people had been abducted, including a pregnant woman. He added that local people were “being kidnapped on a daily basis” for ransom. “We are

tired. The community has been abandoned to face these problems alone...”³⁵ More recently, on 25 January 2020, gunmen attacked passengers after they disembarked at Rigasa train station and were proceeding along the Rigasa/Airport road. Some of the passengers sustained injuries while others were abducted for ransom. It was the second attack within a 24-hour period.³⁶

Kogi State has also become increasingly insecure following a rerun of the gubernatorial election in 2019, which was marred by violence. On 31 January 2020, at least 19 people were killed in a night-time raid on the Tawari community in Kogi LGA by ‘suspected Fulani herdsmen.’³⁷ The gunmen torched houses, a school, a church and the palace of the local ruler. “They entered selected houses, packed foodstuff and motorcycles and burnt selected houses, including homes of clerics.”³⁸ More recently, a bus was high jacked near the capital, Lokoja, on 4 February, and every passenger was kidnapped. One of the passengers, who was released on 11 February after paying N1million (approximately US\$2751.03) in ransom described the kidnappers as being of Fulani ethnicity. He also related how they had made abductees sleep on the floor, had taken turns raping the female victims, and had deprived them of food.³⁹

Surviving abductees, both Christian and Muslim, consistently describe those who were responsible for their ordeal as being Fulani in origin, often stating that they speak in Fulfulde (the Fulani language) and call the attention of abductees by using the clucking sound used by herders for cattle. They are also reported to brutalise all who are not of Fulani ethnicity, regardless of their religious background.⁴⁰

There is speculation that many of the perpetrators may be former almajeris: young boys sent to strict, unregulated religious centres at a tender age, where they are treated harshly, they are vulnerable to abuse and radicalisation, and

³² Punch Nigeria, ‘Kidnappers deploying jammers, encrypted communication to evade arrest – IRT Commander’, 1 December 2019, <https://punchng.com/kidnappers-deploying-jammers-encrypted-communication-to-evade-arrest-irt-commander/>

³³ Neil Munshi, The Financial Times, ‘Threat of abduction makes Nigeria a high-risk business’, 22 November 2019, https://app.ft.com/content/99d6aaea-e394-11e9-9743db5a370481bc?sectionid=reports_investing-in-nigeria

³⁴ Chris Ewokor, BBC, ‘I was kidnapped and now only travel by train’, 7 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-50068625>

³⁵ This Day Live, ‘The Abduction Mess in Kaduna State’, 9 November 2019, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/11/09/theabduction-mess-in-kaduna-state-2/>

³⁶ The Cable Nigeria, ‘Travellers abducted in fresh attack near Kaduna train station’, 27 January 2020, <https://www.thecable.ng/travellers-abducted-in-fresh-attack-near-kaduna-train-station>

³⁷ Yekini Jimoh-Lokoja, Nigeria Tribune, ‘23 Killed, Palace, Houses Burnt Down As Gunmen Attack Community in Kogi’, 3 January 2020, <https://tribuneonline.ng.com/23killed-palace-houses-burnt-down-as-gunmen-attackcommunity-in-kogi/>

³⁸ Mrs Comfort Solomon, survivor, cited in: Pulse Nigeria, ‘Gunmen attack Kogi community, kill 19, burn houses’, 3 January 2020, <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/gunmen-attack-kogi-community-kill-19-burn-houses/5sgs9cw>

³⁹ Story related in a Tweet by Youth Advocate Oluyemi Fasipe, <https://twitter.com/YemieFash/status/1227512286509703168>

⁴⁰ The Nigerian Voice, ‘Horror in Kidnapper's Den (A Must Read)’, 1 June 2019, <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/278650/horror-in-kidnappers-den-a-must-read.html>

they are obliged to study all morning and spend the afternoons begging for food daily.⁴¹

Many kidnapping gangs have hideouts in the thick forests in Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Nasarawa, and between Jos and Bauchi, which is where victims are kept until they are either released or killed. '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.'⁴²

In addition, some of the assailants are frequently reported to be francophone and/or unable to understand Hausa, the lingua franca of northern Nigeria. A CSW Nigeria staff member whose cousin was abducted on 1 January 2020 while travelling to Kainji in Niger State, held in the bush with 24 other victims and then released on 5 February following payment of N5 million (around US\$13,755), interviewed several of the freed victims. They informed him that their captors included people who only spoke French and who were "really tall, fair [in complexion] and wearing turbans." This disclosure echoes information revealed by the notoriously ruthless kidnapper Bello Abdul, who operated on the Abuja-Kaduna highway and is known as 'Yellow'. When he was captured and questioned in September 2019, Yellow had spoken of "strange looking kidnappers that were fair in complexion and deadly. He even said [he and his gang] were afraid of them because of their ruthlessness. Is it possible that foreigners are coming into Nigeria [...] to kidnapped, killed and take the money out of our country?"⁴³

While no faith or ethnic community is immune from abductions for ransom, 2018 and 2019 saw a marked rise in the number of church leaders, their families and lay people in Christian communities being targeted for abduction

and/or murder, with their assailants generally described as being of Fulani ethnicity.⁴⁴

This phenomenon has been particularly marked in Kaduna State, where around 500 Christian villagers were kidnapped, eighteen church leaders had been abducted for ransom, and at least four leaders had been murdered by August 2019. In addition, within that period, some twenty-eight church leaders were ransomed after being kidnapped from their homes. According to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kaduna State Chapter, Christians had been obliged to raise over N300 million (£674,157.30) by the end of August 2019, and the 2020 total so far stands at over N350 million.⁴⁵

For example, in a four-day campaign that began on 6 January 2020, armed men of Fulani origin raided ten Gbagyi communities in the Chikun and Birnin Gwari Local Government Areas (LGAs),⁴⁶ killing at least 35 people. Fifty-eight people were abducted, with their captors demanding over N100 million (around US\$276,000) in ransom to secure their release. Meanwhile, in Enugu State in the south of the country, Fr. Paul Offu, parish priest of St. James the Greater Parish in Ugbawkas, was gunned down in a hail of bullets fired by armed men described as 'Fulani shepherds'. He became the third Catholic priest from the Enugu Diocese to be murdered within a five-month period by assailants of Fulani ethnicity.⁴⁷

Kidnappings by armed men of Fulani ethnicity have also spread to the south and east of Nigeria, where attacks on communities, killings, rape and abductions have occurred with increasing frequency in Delta, Enugu, Ekiti and Ogun.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the impunity surrounding kidnappings for ransom, coupled with the large sums that can be accrued, has encouraged non-Fulani criminal elements to also engage in the practice, including some elements within the security sector. A 2019 investigation revealed that "the

⁴¹ Almajeris are generally treated as nuisances, which may account for why the current kidnappers appear almost incapable of humane behaviour, as they have never seen it modelled consistently.

⁴² Sun News Online, 'MONSTERS: Shocking revelations by captured herdsmen', 29 July 2017, <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/monsters-shocking-revelations-by-captured-herdsmen/>

⁴³ Report from CSWN staff member.

⁴⁴ CSW, 'NIGERIA: Abduction for Ransom,' January 2020

⁴⁵ Information received by CSW from Chair of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kaduna Chapter, Rev John Joseph Hayab, 20 January 2020.

⁴⁶ Plus TV Africa, 'Kidnapping & Banditry: Hundred Dey Seek Intervention By Both The Fed. & Kaduna State Govt. 24 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWurETZsZUQ>

⁴⁷ James Eze, Premium Times Nigeria, 'UPDATED: Gunmen kill another Catholic Priest in Enugu', 2 August 2019, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssoutheast/344420-gunmen-kill-another-catholic-priest-in-enugu.html>

⁴⁸ For example, 'Fulani Herdsmen Rape Woman To Death In

Edo as cited in <https://www.naij.com/67804.html>; Daud Olatunji, Vanguard, 'Fulani herdsmen rape our women, destroy farmlands – Ogun monarchs', 26 February 2016, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/02/fulaniherdsmen-rape-our-women-destroy-farmlands-ogunmonarchs/>; Emmanuel Uzodinma, Daily Post, 'Fulani herdsmen raping, killing our people – Enugu women', 20 October 2015, <http://dailypost.ng/2015/10/20/fulani-herdsmen-rapingkilling-our-people-enugu-women/>; Nigerian Newspapers, 'How Fulani herdsmen butcher men and rape women in Delta Communities', 19 March 2016, <http://www.nigeriannewspapers.today/2016/03/19/howfulani-herdsmen-butcher-men-rape-women-in-deltacommunities/>; Breaking Times, 'Fulani Herdsmen Rape and Terrorize Women in Enugu', 22 October 2015, <http://www.thebreakingtimes.com/fulani-herdsmen-rapeand-terrorize-women-in-enugu/>. Fulani Herdsmen Rape Newlywed In Ogun: <https://www.naij.com/15036.html>

kidnappers terrorizing the people of the south-west zone are drawn from the Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and some other ethnic groups in Nigeria,” as well as francophone foreign elements.⁴⁹

In 2018, Nigeria overtook India, which has seven times its population, as the country with the most extreme poverty in the world. ‘The 86.9 million Nigerians now living in extreme poverty represents nearly 50% of its estimated 180 million population.’⁵⁰ Given such conditions and a continuing downward trajectory, it is hardly surprising that kidnapping is viewed by some who are caught in the poverty trap as a quick source of easy money.

Links with violence in Central Nigeria

There is a link between kidnapping and the militia violence that has been afflicting Christian communities in Nigeria's central states since 2015. According to a kidnapper who was captured in 2017, “everyone is armed with AK47” – the weapon favoured by the militiamen of Fulani ethnicity. Another captured abductor illustrated the linkage between kidnapping and attacks on communities: “What they normally do is that if there is crisis [i.e. trouble with communities], they will give us N1000 each to risk our lives. I was only comfortable with it because they gave me access to guns, which I sometimes use for kidnapping.”⁵¹

This violence, perpetrated by an armed group alternatively described as armed Fulani herdsman, the Fulani militia or Fulani militants, has been ongoing since March 2010 when over 400 people died in attacks on the Christian villages of Dogo Nahawa, Zot, and Ratsat in Plateau State, which 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.⁵² It increased exponentially in 2015 and has been occurring cyclically in central states, with perpetrators able to change their location at will without being detected or intercepted. In addition, a concomitant proliferation of small arms has contributed to the nationwide surge in lawlessness.⁵³

The use of the term ‘Fulani militia’ is not a condemnation or denigration of the entire people group, as there are many

Fulani communities and herders living peaceably alongside farming communities of other ethnicities and/or religious beliefs, and who oppose this violence. Neither does it imply that other ethnic groups do not rear cattle. It merely denotes that this particular armed group appears to consist exclusively of people who are of Fulani ethnicity, for reasons which require a far more in-depth examination.

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. From time to time, there were fatalities during these traditional “farmer-herder clashes” in Nigeria, with protagonists generally using sticks, stones, machetes and – at worst – locally-made Dane hunting guns.

However, current attacks are occurring with such frequency, organisation and asymmetry that this nomenclature no longer suffices. Annual death tolls have increased exponentially. Moreover, there is no evidence of these attacks being replicated on a similar scale in neighbouring states that are experiencing the same environmental and climatological challenges as Nigeria.

Armed with increasingly sophisticated weaponry – including AK-47s and in some cases chemicals and rocket launchers – the militia has claimed more lives since 2015 than Boko Haram, displacing tens of thousands, and in many instances, occupying vacated land or using abandoned farms as grazing areas. While there have indeed been instances of retributive violence and even preventative attacks by farming communities, there remains a clear asymmetry in violence. During the first quarter of 2018 alone, CSW documented 106 attacks on farming communities in central Nigeria that claimed 1,061 lives, while 7 attacks targeted Fulani herders or communities within the same timeframe, two of which occurred in the south of the country, claiming a total of 61 lives.⁵⁴

The violence has mutated from its traditional form into a sustained, deadly campaign with outworkings that increasingly reflect Nigeria's main religious fault line. Religion and ethnicity appear to be an effective rallying point

⁴⁹ Findings of an investigation into the kidnapping in the south west launched by Mr Femi Falana, Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), cited in Ademola Adegbamigbe, PM News, ‘Fulani Alone Not Responsible for Kidnappings, Other Tribes Deeply Involved – Falana’, <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2019/06/07/fulanialone-not-responsible-for-kidnappings-other-tribesdeeply-involved-falana/>

⁵⁰ Yomi Kazeem, Quartz Africa, ‘Nigeria has become the poverty capital of the world’, 25 June 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1313380/nigerias-has-the-highest-rate-of-extreme-poverty-globally/>

⁵¹ Sun News Online, ‘MONSTERS: Shocking revelations by captured herdsman’.

⁵² Robyn Dixon, Los Angeles Times, ‘Taking turns at slaughter in Nigeria, 17 March 2010, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-mar-17la-fg-nigeria-jos17-2010mar17-story.html>; CSW, ‘Protests held in Jos after massacre’, 8 March 2010, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2010/03/08/press/964/article.htm>

⁵³ Extract from CSW, ‘Farmer – Herder Issue,’ a submission for All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry, 2019

⁵⁴ CSW, ‘Nigeria: Freedom of religion or belief’, 9 July 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/07/09/report/4036/article.htm>

for the militia. In this region, ethnicity generally correlates with religion; consequently, several observers have described these attacks as being part of a campaign of ethno-religious cleansing.⁵⁵

Attacks continue unabated, with assailants seemingly able to move at will from one state to another without interception. Victims interviewed in remote areas of Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, and Taraba States repeatedly describe well-armed assailants dressed entirely in black and, in some instances, carrying a "black flag." For example, in December 2018, members of a community in Taraba State, who watched the militia travelling in broad daylight to attack another community after being reassured that theirs was not the target, informed CSW that they had counted 150 "large machines" (motorcycles) with three people sitting on each one. Survivors from different locations have clarified that one man steers the motorcycle as one shoots to the left and another to the right. In addition, the large motorcycles are followed by around 50 more militants, some of whom are on foot. Survivors also repeatedly described how militants who bring up the rear kill the injured, mutilate bodies, loot and destroy.⁵⁶

The failure of both the state and federal government to address this violence effectively, and to trace and penalized its perpetrators, has entrenched impunity. Moreover, members of the victim communities are regularly threatened, detained arbitrarily and judicially harassed for voicing concerns and faulting ineffective security arrangements. For example, following an attack on Fan in Plateau State on 29 August 2018 that claimed one life and was part of a series of assaults on the area, the military arrived just after the assailants left and killed an unarmed woman for attempting to prevent the soldiers from detaining local youth, and asking them to pursue the militia men instead.⁵⁷ In Kaduna State, journalists, activists, community leaders and even human rights defenders who highlight the ongoing situation in the southern part of the state are frequently subjected to arbitrary detention and/or judicial harassment.⁵⁸

Numerous survivors relate occasions when security operatives assigned to protect their villages have: arrived after assailants have fled, despite having received numerous distress calls; have attempted to defend villagers but have run out of supplies; have requested reinforcements that did not arrive; or they have appeared unwilling to assist, and/or complicit in the violence:

"I tried to return [after the attack] I saw a bad military attitude. They assault girls and women and shoot sporadically on non-military grounds if people disagree. Some people have been killed by security. For example, a man we called 'Young Pastor.' That is why we say we don't want a military presence."

- **Elderly male survivor from Godogodo village, southern Kaduna state in 2016**

"They attacked and began looting and burning on 28 June at around 5pm. They had shot five people dead and burned another. We had nowhere to go. The military eventually gathered us into at their base. The militia stood outside the barracks shouting that they should be allowed them to kill us. By their accents we knew they were Fulanis. They were shouting that it is their place, that we took their place from them." They were shooting in the air and shouting from 5pm until 2am."

- **Female survivor from Kakuruk, Gashish LGA, Plateau state, which was attacked in 2018**

ACN News, 20 July 2018, <https://aidtochurch.org/acnnews/396-nigerian-bishop-fears-for-the-worst-fromattacks-by-fulani-herdsmen>

⁵⁶ Interviews conducted by CSW during country visits in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

⁵⁷ CSW, 'Nigeria: At Least 11 Dead in Militia Attacks', 4 September 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/09/04/press/4065/article.htm>.

⁵⁸ Religious Liberty Partnership, 'Religious Liberty Partnership Releases 2019 Statement on Nigeria', 10 May 2019, <https://rlpartnership.org/religious-libertypartnership-releases-2019-statement-on-nigeria/>;

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

⁵⁵ CSW, 'Nigerian Church Voices Concern about Fulani attacks', 18 November 2016 <https://www.csw.org.uk/2016/11/18/press/3347/article.htm>; CSW, 'UN Oral Statement on Nigeria', 15 March 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/03/15/report/3872/article.htm>; Adrian Blomfield, The Telegraph, 'The bloody cattle conflict pushing Nigeria to the edge of civil war', 17 June 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-andsecurity/battle-scarce-resources-muslim-cattle-herderschristian-farmers/>; Bangkok Post, 'Nigeria killings called "ethnic, religious cleansing"', 7 January 2012, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/274154/nigeriakingillings-called-ethnic-religious-cleansing>;

"At around 2pm we started to hear heavy shooting it continued to evening. The military men in the community called for reinforcements, but none came. They fled with villagers around 11 am when they could no longer resist. They arrived shouting 'Allah u Akbar and began burning the village. Thirty of us were hiding in a room. Some were so afraid they urinated."

- **Female survivor from Ratsat Community, Plateau state, which was attacked on 28 June 2018**

A female survivor of an attack on the Dorowa community in Plateau State on 25 June 2018 informed CSW that, as the attack by militia men dressed in black intensified, her son was shot by a military tank as Muslim soldiers gave the militia cover. She shared: "there was a previous incident when Christian shops were being burnt and Muslims in the army gave them cover."⁵⁹

Abiding concerns regarding the complicity of elements in the armed forces appeared to receive added credence on 24 March 2018, when former Army Chief of Staff and Defence Minister Lt General Theophilus Y Danjuma stated publicly, during the maiden convocation of the Taraba State

University in Jalingo, that the armed forces were "not neutral – they collude" in the "ethnic cleansing" of riverine states by the militia. He advised villagers to defend themselves, because depending on the armed forces would mean dying "one by one."⁶⁰

The general's comments occasioned strong protests to the contrary by government supporters. However, he was vindicated to some extent on August 6, 2019, when the captured notorious kidnapper Hamisu Bala, also known as Wadume, was allegedly assisted in escaping from a police Intelligence Response Team by soldiers from the 93rd Battalion in Takum, Taraba State, who were manning a checkpoint. On the orders of their captain, Tijani Balarabe, the soldiers shot and killed Inspector Mark Ediale, Sergeants Usman Danzumi and Dahiru Musa and an unnamed civilian, and injured 5 other officers.

Wadume was eventually rearrested. In a televised confession, he described how, following the shootings, "the soldiers took me to their HQ & cut off the handcuffs on my hands and I ran away."⁶¹ He also declared that members of the Nigerian Army and Police Force were on his pay roll, and that he was "working closely with these security personnel in his nefarious business of kidnapping and 419,"⁶² and this has been supported by the activities of the security agent soldier and police which lead to the arrest, release and re-arrest of Wadume."⁶³

The killings exposed the dysfunctional relationship between the two key agencies in the security sector, as the Nigerian Police force released an unprecedented series of Tweets decrying the murder of their officers, soliciting public sympathy and demanding justice.⁶⁴ Then in February 2020, IGP Mohammed Adamu filed a 16count charge against Captain Balarbe, Wadume and 18 others stating they had "conspired together to commit felony, to wit acts of terrorism, by attacking and kidnapping one Usman Garba, aka Mayo, at his filling station in Takum, thereby committing an offence contrary to Section 17 of the Terrorism (Prevention) Amendment Act 2013."⁶⁵ The defendants were also accused of possessing six AK-47 rifles and dealing in prohibited firearms contrary to Section 27 (1)(a)(i) and (1)(b)(iii) of the Firearms Act Cap F28, Laws of the Federation, 2004.⁶⁶

In another worrying development, 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 the 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'.⁶⁷ Other weapons uncovered by CAR included Iraqi assault rifles manufactured in 1987, whose markings were obliterated in a distinctive manner: 'Terrorist groups have used weapons from the same batch, with markings rendered illegible in the same manner, in successive attacks on security forces in Mali and Niger since 2016'.⁶⁸ CAR also documented the use of Turkish manufactured semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns that matched 'several thousand weapons that were shipped

⁵⁹ Testimonies included in CSW, 'Farmer-Herder Issue', 2019

⁶⁰ Channels Television, 'Armed Forces Collude With Those Behind Killings – T.Y. Danjuma', 24 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIe94EzvHm4>

⁶¹ Ruthless Analyst, 20 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/RuthlessAnalyst/status/1163893269270581248>

⁶² The number denotes the Nigerian law promulgated to address Advance-Fee Fraud.

⁶³ <https://www.independent.ng/wadume-how-danjumawas-vindicated/>

⁶⁴ The hashtag #provideanswersnigerianarmy was launched in response.

⁶⁵ Dennis Erezi, The Guardian Nigeria, 'Police file terrorism charge against Army captain, Wandume, 18 others', 5 February 2020, <https://guardian.ng/news/police-fileterrorism-charge-against-army-captain-wandume-18others/>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Conflict Armament Research, 'Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Conflict', <https://www.conflictarm.com/>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

in containers from Istanbul to Lagos in 2017 and that were linked to a major organised trafficking network.⁶⁹

A metastasized threat

The failure to address the violence afflicting farming communities in central states has contributed to the lawlessness that is now impacting north western states. This region 'which used to be the bastion of security and stability,' is now wracked by rural banditry.⁷⁰

'Rural banditry refers to armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation. The victims are individuals and communities with material valuables. The most common examples of rural banditry in Nigeria are armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and village raids. [...] Rural banditry in north western Nigeria also derives impetus from poorly governed mining and small arms sectors. Bandits are drawn to the region by illicit and artisanal mining in states like Zamfara, where bandits have been raiding mining sites for gold and cash.'⁷¹ The phenomenon has also thrived due to the remoteness of rural communities, which are located where there is little or no government presence, and an accompanying absence of effective community policing mechanisms.

The banditry in Birnin Gwari, northern Kaduna State, and in Katsina Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara States, also involves armed men of Fulani ethnicity – many hailing from neighbouring countries – who have killed, brutalized, raped and murdered many thousands of Muslim Hausa villagers. 'This intrareligious and broadly ethnic conflict dates back to 2012. Its genesis is obscured in a history of cattle rustling, mining interests and vigilantes, with Hausa communities generally suffering at the hands of all three, and it now resembles 'an attempt at clearing villages in parts of the area of people.'⁷²

A 50 year-old teacher from Zamfara who was abducted when a bus in which he was travelling was stopped by young assailants brandishing AK47s, G3s, AK-49s and machete, described how the kidnapping cartel that seized him was one of several in the forested area where he was held, adding that the cartels were able to gather intelligence on the movements of civilians, and predict upcoming military raids.

He also confirmed that kidnappers kill victims whose families cannot raise the ransom without remorse, and dump their bodies in the forest: "Even far from the trench I could feel the strong smell. The guard said I would be killed and dumped in that place if I did not cooperate."⁷³

Organized local and transnational criminal syndicates are heavily involved, with non-Nigerians able to penetrate the country easily through its porous northern border. "There are over 1,000 footpaths that can lead you in and out of Nigeria which are not formally protected. When you join that to lack of political will [to address the violence], it's normal to have this crisis."⁷⁴

It also appears that in both Zamfara and Katsina States, these armed groups increasingly include terrorist elements. During a two-day fact-finding visit to Zamfara State conducted in 2018, members of a Federal Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Security Infrastructure were informed the armed bandits consist of heavily-armed Fulani herdsmen and fleeing Boko Haram insurgents, and they were warned by the state's deputy governor warned that the crisis in Zamfara had "the potential of consuming the state and escalating beyond its borders," if it was left insufficiently addressed.⁷⁵

Rising Insecurity in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

The FCT shares borders with four states which are experiencing insecurity, namely Kaduna, Kogi, Nasarawa and Niger, and many from these areas have sought refuge there. 'For the past half-decade, security fissures in such places as Kaduna, Nasarawa and even far-off states such as Benue and Plateau have fuelled a significant influx of people into the borders of the Federal Capital Territory.'⁷⁶ In addition, the Abuja-Kaduna highway, linking it with the northwest of the country, has been under sustained attack by kidnapping gangs.

While Abuja had been previously spared the violence afflicting surrounding states, it has experienced a rise in abductions for ransom since August 2019, when the national chairman of Action Alliance Kenneth Udeze was kidnapped, along with his wife, by armed attackers outside a Zenith

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ The Conversation, 'What can be done in the fight rural banditry in northern Nigeria', 12 September 2019, <https://theconversation.com/what-can-be-done-to-fight-rural-banditry-in-northern-nigeria-122776>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² CSW, 'Submission to the 126th Human Rights Committee'

⁷³ Orji Sunday, TRT World, 'Nigeria's kidnapping cartels thrive in the absence of government', 5 September 2019,

<https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/nigeria-skidnapping-cartels-thrive-in-the-absence-of-governance29562>

⁷⁴ Nnamdi Anekwe-Chive, Lagos based political analyst cited in Ibid.

⁷⁵ The Sun News 'How bandits rape, abduct, kill in Zamfara – Residents', 8 March 2018, <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/how-bandits-rape-abduct-kill-in-zamfara-residents/>

⁷⁶ SBM Intelligence, 'Rising Insecurity in Abuja' 4 February 2020, <https://www.sbmintel.com/2020/02/risinginsecurity-in-abuja/>

Bank branch in Dutse Alhaji. Since then 9 abductions have taken place, the latest of which occurred on 2 February 2020 when gunmen forced a fully loaded Toyota Previa bus off the PiriKwali road and kidnapped seven passengers and the driver.⁷⁷ 'Commuters particularly face a growing risk of being robbed in taxis operated by criminal elements commonly known as 'one chance.' On an almost daily basis, reports of a kidnap make the news.'⁷⁸

Possible ways forward

President Buhari has been accused by some of his detractors of failing to address militia violence during its initial stage of targeting non-Muslim communities in central Nigeria, and even after it began in the south, because of his shared ethnicity with the perpetrators.

Once the violence had mutated into a major threat to north western states, a series of military operations were launched from 2017 that focused on northern Kaduna and the north western states only. However, because these operations failed to address it in a comprehensive manner, it continues to increase and is threatening the very fabric of the nation. Inadequate interventions and the unchecked proliferation of small arms have facilitated a dangerous rise in general lawlessness that gives Nigeria the appearance of being a state in the process of failing. "Nigeria is on the crossroads and its future hangs precariously in a balance."⁷⁹

In a speech delivered in 2019, former president Olusegun Obasanjo, an erstwhile supporter of President Buhari, warned that the government had not responded to the Fulani militia effectively, and that the armed forces were unprepared, under-resourced and demoralised. He added: "It is now West African Fulanisation [in the case of the militia, and]; African Islamisation and global organised crimes of human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, gun running, illegal mining and regime change [in the case of ISWAP and Boko Haram]." He urged the Federal Government to rally local stakeholders and the international community to formulate and put into effect a strategy to address these threats successfully.⁸⁰ He later released an open letter reminiscent of one he had written to the president's predecessor, accusing President Buhari of "poor management or mismanagement of diversity," which

Obasanjo described as Nigeria's greatest assets, and adding that the current criminality was "being perceived as a 'Fulani' menace unleashed by Fulani elite in the different parts of the country for a number of reasons but even more, unfortunately, many Nigerians and non-Nigerians who are friends of Nigeria attach vicarious responsibility to you as a Fulani elite and the current captain of the Nigeria ship."⁸¹

The proliferation of armed non-state actors and the continuing advances by the terrorist factions have led to calls for an urgent and comprehensive overhaul of the leadership of Nigeria's security services, specifically, the removal of service chiefs who have been in office since 2015, and whose tactics have failed to prevent a nationwide slide into insecurity. 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 abduction 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, equipping of troops in a manner commensurate with terrain and ensuring morale. Fresh thinking is essential to prevent the country from descending into further chaos.

A comprehensive security approach is urgently needed, given the increasingly visible links between what may appear to be disparate sources of violence. Banditry in the northwest cannot be addressed in isolation from attacks on sedentary communities in central states. Reports of the presence of terrorist elements and foreigners in kidnapping gangs underline the need for a holistic and coordinated strategy. With regard to Nigeria's porous borders, 'there is no more effective solution than forceful inland and frontier policing. Such policing must deal with the region's peculiar circumstances of diverse borderlines, forestlands, and hinterlands. This requires a tactical synergy between grassroots vigilantes and the state security operatives,'⁸² given the former's knowledge of the local terrain.

In addition, in the absence of effective state protection, communities under siege from kidnappers and militia should be permitted to arm and protect themselves in an orderly and effective manner. This process must be facilitated by the government, as is currently occurring in

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah cited in: Evelyn Okakwu, Premium Times Nigeria, '(FULL SPEECH): What Bishop Kukah said about Buhari, Insecurity, others', 12 February 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/morenews/376995-full-speech-what-bishop-kukah-said-aboutbuhari-insecurity-others.html>

⁸⁰ "Mobilising Nigeria's Human and Natural Resources for National Development and Stability" speech delivered at the second session Synod of Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Delta State, May 2019

⁸¹ The Punch 'ICYMI: Full text of Obasanjo's letter to Buhari', 15 July 2019 <https://punchng.com/full-text-of-obasanjosopen-letter-to-buhari/>

⁸² Chukwuma Al Okoli, The Conversation, 'What can be done to fight rural banditry in northern Nigeria', 12 September 2019, published in: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/what-can-be-doneto-fight-rural-banditry-northern-nigeria>

Burkina Faso.⁸³ On 9 January 2020, the governors of Nigeria's six southwest states⁸⁴ launched a security force named 'Operation Amotekun',⁸⁵ in response to repeated attacks by Fulani herdsmen, which included the murder of a daughter of a Yoruba grandee.⁸⁶ In view of the current security vacuum that is occasioning an inordinate loss of life, other states should be assisted to do likewise.

The African Union has designated 2020 the year of "Silencing the Guns." As he addressed the 33rd AU summit in Ethiopia in early February, which the Nigerian President attended, UN Secretary General

Antonio Guterres pointed out that "Silencing the Guns [was] not just about peace and security, but also inclusive sustainable development and human rights." Not only is peace and security under unprecedented threat in Nigeria, but "the rising levels of insecurity throughout the country constitute a threat to investment and sustainable development."⁸⁷

The Secretary General also stressed that poverty, climate change and silencing guns are the continent's three major challenges. 'Ending poverty in Nigeria will entail improving the country's economic productivity and opportunities for its citizens. This will mean investing in human capital potential and creating jobs for women and young people, increasing financial access and opportunities these groups in rural communities, and advancing technological innovation.'⁸⁸ Consequently, alongside the importance of addressing the current security vacuum, there is an urgent need to provide economic opportunities for those who are vulnerable to radicalization and/or criminality. Urgent consideration should also be given to reforming the almajeri system, and ensuring its alumni receive a basic education, along with income-generating skills that will give them a stake in society.

However, until the terrorist threat is completely brought to an end, the current practice of rehabilitating and releasing allegedly repentant Boko Haram fighters should be

suspended. 983 were released in November 2019 alone, some of whom reportedly return to battle. Military widows have expressed dissatisfaction at this policy, and there are also reports of soldiers getting restive. What is more, captured terrorists appear to receive better care and support in rehab than the tens of thousands displaced internally by their activities who live in camps where reports continue to emerge of the theft of supplies, trauma, gender-based violence and survival sex. Until such violence ceases, the government should redirect these resources towards assisting and rehabilitating victims and providing better care for soldiers and their families.

According to the Nigerian Constitution, the 'security and welfare of the people' are 'the primary purpose of government' (S114 (2) (b) (c)). The constitution also recognises equal rights for all citizens, the sanctity of human life and human dignity (17:2. b). Therefore, the government is under an obligation to muster the political will to protect Nigerian citizens regardless of their creed or ethnicity, and to secure the nation before it is too late. Until then, unrelenting news of increasingly gruesome violence committed with impunity will continue to inflict untold damage on the national psyche:

"We are getting dangerously close to where these killings would become 'normal'. We get startled, then we mourn, then we settle down to wait for the next one. Then the next and the next happened and wears out our shock and sympathy. Then it becomes normal and we adjust to live with it. Charred flesh, disembowelled bodies, beheading and indistinguishable bodies scattered grotesquely on our soil do not bother us. We adjust and carry on. In the midst of it, some still find the insensitive luxury to play politics. They insist that all is well. [...] But how do we convince the victims in Auno who died needlessly that all is well? How do we tell their grieving relatives that all is well? How many more lives do we have to lose to know that something is not well with our country? May God protect the people in Maiduguri and other places in Nigeria."⁸⁹

⁸³ Al Jazeera, 'Burkina Faso to recruit civilians in fight against armed groups', 23 January 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/burkina-fasorecruit-civilians-fight-armed-groups200123153206911.html>

⁸⁴ Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo and Lagos.

⁸⁵ "Amotekan" means "Leopard" in Yoruba.

⁸⁶ Charles Coffie-Gyamfi, Oluwaseun Akingboye and Rotimi Agboluaje, The Guardian Nigeria, 'Ondo, Ogun states approve Amotekun Bill', 13 February 2020, <https://guardian.ng/news/ondo-ogun-states-approveamotekun-bill/>;

PM News, 'Herdsmen kill Afenifere leader, Pa Fasoranti's daughter', 12 July 2019, <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2019/07/12/herdsmenkill-afenifere-leader-pa-fasorantis-daughter/>

⁸⁷ Mervyn Thomas, CSW's CEO, cited in: CSW, 'CSW calls for UK to raise spike in abductions and violence in London talks with president', 17 January 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/17/press/4527/article.htm>; and in: CSW, 'Boko Haram executes chair of Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa State', 21 January 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/21/press/4530/article.htm>

⁸⁸ Muhammad Sani Abdullahi, World Economic Forum, 'Three things Nigeria must do to end extreme poverty', 21 March 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/90-millionnigerians-live-in-extreme-poverty-here-are-3-ways-to-bring-them-out/>

⁸⁹ Reuben Buhari, CSWN Press Officer and former media advisor of the late governor of Kaduna State, Patrick Yakowa, 11 February 2020.

About CSW

CSW is a human rights organisation advocating for freedom of religion or belief, and as Christians we stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief.