

APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA (March 2024)

STOP THE SLAUGHTER OF NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS



*Graves being dug in Bokkos LGA, Plateau state in January 2024
for some of the 200 Christians killed in the "Black Christmas " attacks*



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Intersociety Report 2023 (extract)

Christian Solidarity Worldwide UPR Submission (extract)

Church in Chains is an independent Irish charity that encourages prayer and action in support of persecuted Christians worldwide. It is a member of the Department of Foreign Affairs Committee on Human Rights.

This briefing has been compiled by David Turner (Director).

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Mr Jibirilla Adamu
Charge d'Affaires
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
56 Leeson Park
DUBLIN 6

4 January 2024

Dear Mr Adamu,

I write to express the shock and horror of Irish Christians at the horrific wave of attacks over the Christmas period against thirty majority-Christian villages in Plateau state in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.

A fact-finding report from a Church in Chains partner organisation has listed a total of 238 people killed in the attacks which were mainly concentrated on villages in the Bokkos and Barakin Ladi Local Government Areas. As has been well-documented in the international media, more than three hundred wounded people were rushed to hospital. An estimated 10,000 people have been displaced. Over 1,500 homes were destroyed in the attacks and eight churches and parsonages were burnt down.

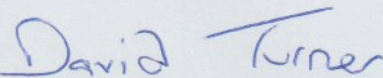
Irish Christians lament the fact that the Nigerian authorities have failed to take effective action to protect the Christian community in the Middle Belt region and to bring the perpetrators of the ongoing violence to justice. We appeal for Nigerian government agencies to urgently provide essential relief and assistance to those displaced by the attacks and also call for an increased security presence in the area, which has been targeted in previous militant attacks.

Church in Chains also echoes the call of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk for the Nigerian authorities to conduct a prompt, independent investigation "consistent with international human rights law" and for the perpetrators of these attacks to be held accountable.

I would welcome a meeting with you to discuss our concerns for our fellow-Christians in Nigeria and to learn from you what steps the Nigerian government is proposing to take to address this grievous situation.

I can be contacted by email or phone (see details above).

Yours respectfully,



David Turner
(Director)

NIGERIA: Over 200 Christians killed in “Black Christmas” attacks

04Jan2024

On Christmas Eve, hundreds of armed terrorists attacked around thirty majority-Christian villages in Plateau state in Nigeria’s Middle Belt region. Waves of attacks continued until 30 December.

A fact-finding report from Stefanos Foundation (a Church in Chains partner organisation) titled “*Black Christmas 2023*” listed a total of 238 people killed in the attacks, which were mainly concentrated on villages in the Bokkos and Barakin Ladi Local Government Areas. Monday Kassah, head of local government in Bokkos, said that more than three hundred wounded people were rushed to hospitals in Bokkos, Jos and Barakin Ladi following the attacks. An estimated 10,000 people have been displaced and over 1,500 homes were destroyed in the attacks. Eight churches and parsonages were burnt down in the attacks.

Eye-witness Account

Stefanos Foundation interviewed an eye witness, Rev Gideon Dawel, the District Overseer of Christ’s Apostolic Church, whose wife and five daughters were burnt to death at their residence at the church pastorium in Kambarpelli in Tangor District.

Rev Gideon (on right of picture) said he stood far away with members of the vigilante group who were supposed to be protecting the community and heard the attackers shouting “Allah ak’abar” (Allah is great). He said that armed terrorists led the attack followed by others with machetes, ahead of others with flames who burnt down the houses. The vigilantes went into hiding as they were outnumbered by the attackers who were more heavily armed.

Rev Gideon said he could not come out of hiding until daybreak at 6am

when he went to his house to find it burnt. Some rooms where grains were stored were still burning and he sat outside his burnt home as people came to greet him expecting that his wife and children would emerge from their hideout. Unknown to him, their bodies lay in the ashes of their home. When eventually someone went into the rubble and discovered the remains of his family, he collapsed and was taken unconscious to hospital.

Attackers were local Fulani herdsmen

Other survivors of the attacks recognised local Fulani herdsmen as the attackers. One woman who only survived by remaining motionless after being shot, recognised the gunman as her Fulani neighbour. She said she was shocked as she lay there watching her neighbour checking to see if she was dead. When he saw she was motionless, he went after her husband and hacked him to death with a machete.

An initial report from Christian Solidarity Worldwide Nigeria called for Nigerian government agencies to urgently provide essential relief and assistance to those displaced by the attacks. It also called for an increased security presence in the area, which has been targeted in previous militant attacks.

The wave of attacks has been widely condemned. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk called on the Nigerian authorities to conduct a prompt, independent investigation “consistent with international human rights law”. He called for the perpetrators to be held accountable, saying “The cycle of impunity fuelling recurrent violence must be urgently broken.”

Amnesty International Nigeria warned: “The Nigerian authorities’ consistent failure to stem the tide of violent attacks on communities in Plateau state is costing people’s lives and livelihoods, and without immediate concrete action many more lives may be lost.”

(Stefanos Foundation, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, CSW-Nigeria, Morning Star News, Barnabas Fund)



Bokkos Attacks

(Dec 2023)



OTHER CASES OF CONCERN



LEAH SHARIBU

Leah Sharibu (20) is one of a group of 110 girls abducted by Boko Haram faction Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in February 2018 from their school in Dapchi, Yobe state in northeast Nigeria. The other girls were Muslims and were released, but Leah is a Christian and the militants said they would only release her if she converted to Islam. She refused. Leah is just one of thousands of women and children taken prisoner by Boko Haram since 2009.

LATEST NEWS (OCTOBER 2023): Rumours circulated claiming that Leah had remarried another ISWAP commander, with some reporting that “local security sources” said Leah divorced her first husband, while others suggested that he was killed in clashes.

APPEAL TO GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA: On the sixth anniversary of Leah’s abduction, her family demanded that the Nigerian government under the new administration of President Ahmed Tinubu should negotiate the release of Leah Sharibu and other women and girls like her in captivity.



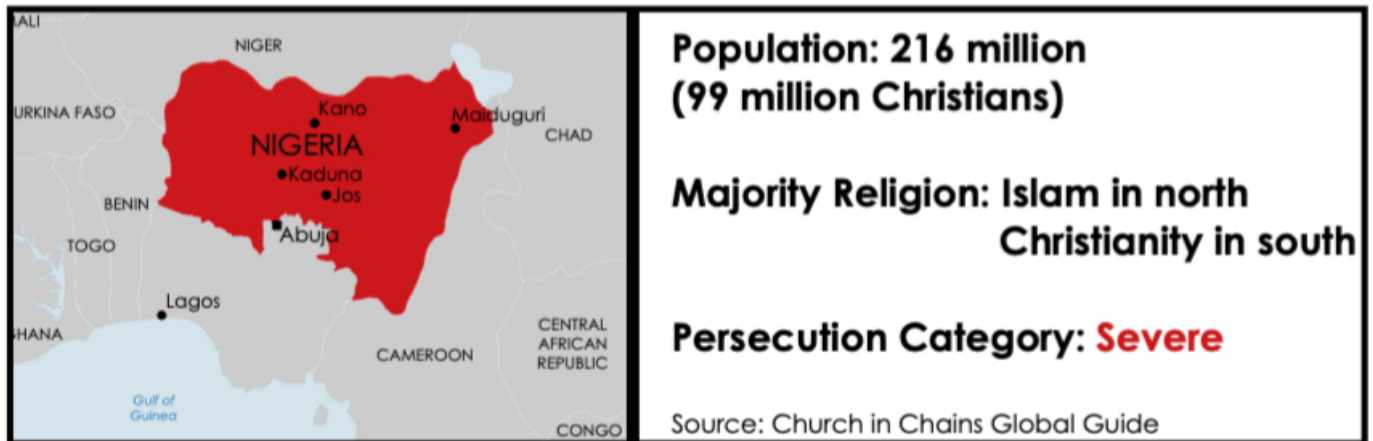
RHODA JATAU

Rhoda is a Christian healthcare worker who was arrested on 20 May 2022 after she allegedly forwarded a blasphemous video clip to a closed WhatsApp group for staff at the Primary Healthcare Board where she worked, the Warji Local Government Health Management. The two-minute 26-second video clip contained content in which an individual condemned the lynching of Christian student Deborah Emmanuel in Sokoto state on 12 May 2022.

LATEST NEWS (DECEMBER 2023): Rhoda was released on bail after 18 months in detention on charges of inciting public disturbance, exciting contempt of a religious creed (the civil equivalent of blasphemy under Sharia law) and cyberstalking. On 27 November Bauchi High Court rejected a “no-case submission” request submitted by Rhoda’s defence, ruling that she does have a case to answer.

APPEAL TO GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA: While the granting of bail to Rhoda is welcomed, it is now time to drop the charges against Rhoda Jatau. The allegations against her are completely unproven and the continuation of the case is a violation of her human rights under Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

NIGERIA COUNTRY PROFILE



The north is mainly Muslim and the south is mainly Christian, with the country divided by the volatile Middle Belt region.

Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram and its splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province brutally attack Christian communities in the north, where Sharia law is in place in twelve states. Militant Fulani herdsmen carry out attacks across the Middle Belt, using heavy weapons to drive largely Christian farmers off fertile grazing land, and these attacks are spreading south. Many analysts now describe the situation in these regions as genocide.

Islamist militants have killed around 10,000 Christians since 2015 and have injured, raped or kidnapped thousands more. They also attack government institutions and moderate Muslims who do not share their jihadist agenda. Millions of Christians have fled following the looting and burning of their houses and church buildings. While many mass school kidnappings have been carried out in recent years, abduction of individuals for ransom is an increasing issue and has become a huge source of fear for Christians.

Conditions for Christians have greatly deteriorated under President Muhammadu Buhari, who came power in 2015. An ethnic Fulani Muslim, his government has failed to protect Christians and prosecute perpetrators of attacks, and he has appointed mostly northern Muslims to high offices and the judiciary. Presidential tickets traditionally comprise a Muslim and a Christian candidate to ensure religious diversity and regional balance, but in August 2022 Nigeria's ruling party announced that its Muslim presidential candidate for the 2023 general election had selected a Muslim running mate. Christians and civil society groups described the selection as divisive.

Church in Chains' partner organisation Stefanos Foundation supports Christians in the north and Middle Belt who have been bereaved, injured or lost crops, homes and church buildings in Islamist attacks. Working with local churches, Stefanos identifies those in greatest need and provides emergency food, shelter and trauma counselling workshops.

APPEAL FROM STEFANOS FOUNDATION (Church in Chains partner organisation)

1. Attacks against Christian communities in the Middle Belt region have been allowed to continue for too long. The attackers are from the same group, targeting the same people. Stefanos Foundation believes that the Christmas Eve attack was a carefully laid out plan to desecrate the Christian festival and against the exercise of the right to express Freedom of Religion or Belief.
2. Stefanos Foundation calls for a Special investigation into the atrocities to bring justice to the situation (the perpetrators should face prosecution and the victims should be granted compensation).
3. Stefanos Foundation calls for the Nigerian government to strengthen security surveillance in all regions where attacks have taken place and by situating armed personnel barracks in the area to boost survivors confidence in security.
4. Stefanos Foundation observed that the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are mostly not organised and are in need of food, medicine, shelter, psychosocial support and trauma healing.
5. Stefanos Foundation observed that IDPs are usually neglected by local authorities and often go to live with relatives in very inadequate conditions. Stefanos Foundation appeals to the Nigerian Government to help the victims in rebuilding their destroyed properties so that they can go back to settle properly with their families.
6. Stefanos Foundation calls on the Nigerian Government to look into the rehabilitation and resettlement of survivors to their ancestral land to avoid ethnic cleansing.



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES AND RULE OF LAW

Jihadist Genocide Of Christians In Nigeria Bloodiest In 2023: 8,222 Hacked To Death From Jan-Jan

..Nigeria: second deadliest genocide country (150,000 deaths since 2009) after Syria's 306,000 deaths since 2011

... Nigeria is second in the world list of 'Fourteen Genocides' (ongoing) and 'Seven Warning Genocides'

Emerging Shocking Statistics:

- *1,450 Christian Deaths In 2023 In Benue, 1,400 In Plateau, 822 In Kaduna, 730 In Niger, Etc*
- *8,400 Christians Abducted In 2023 And 840 Never Returned Alive From Captivity*
- *Military, Police Abducted 800 In 2023 In South-East Who Never Returned Alive Till Date*
- *Jihadist Herdsmen Abducted 1000 Easterners In 2023 In The East And Slaughtered 600 In Captivity*
- *Islamic Terror Jihadists Abducted 1,300 In 2023 In Niger, 1100 In Kaduna And 400 In FCT, Etc*
- *500 Churches Attacked In 2023 And 18,500 Since 2009*
- *70 Christian Clerics Abducted In 2023 And At Least 25 Killed*
- *300 Christian Communities Sacked In 2023 And More than 1,100 Since 2009*
- *50m Christians Religiously Threatened Mostly In The North Since 2009, Millions Forced To Flee*
- *15m Christian IDPs Generated And Hundreds Of Thousands Crossed Int'l Borders*
- *3m IDPs In Benue Alone With Old Millions In Borno, Adamawa, Taraba And Yobe*
- *Fresh Millions Of IDPs Risen In Niger, FCT, Nasarawa, Kogi, Ondo, Enugu, Etc*

Nigeria: International Investigative Report

Ash-Wednesday, February 14, 2024

- **Jihadist Genocide Of Christians Rages And Ravages Nigeria:** Nigeria has become the second deadliest **Genocide-Country** in the world accounting for more than 150,000 religiously motivated defenseless civilian deaths since 2009 (fifteen years of Boko Haram Jihadist Uprising in Nigeria). The Nigeria's alarming death toll is only surpassed by the battered State of Syria which has been embroiled in devastating civil war since 2011 with civilian deaths of 306,000 out of about 21.5m citizens. The Nigerian death toll would have been more than five times higher than those of Syria if the country had engaged in open genocidal warfare-with over 200m citizens. The massacre of Christians in Nigeria is now dubbed "Silent Genocide" or "Jihadist Genocide of Christians". Killings and associated grisly and egregious violence against persons or groups and properties of international coloration; perpetrated on the grounds of ethnicity and religion accounted for over 150,000 defenseless civilian deaths since 2009, leading to burning down or wanton destruction of tens of thousands of civilian dwelling houses, over 18,500 Sacred Places of Christian Worship, 1000 Traditional Religious Sanctuaries and 2,500 Christian/Traditional Learning Centers during which over 59,000 square kilometers of landmass (twice the size of South-East Nigeria) ancestrally belonging to indigenous Christians and non Muslim others were seized and their owners uprooted and sacked in at least ten States. The over 150,000 religiously related deaths in Nigeria in fifteen years had included 'direct deaths' of at least 100,000 and 'indirect deaths' of 50,000. Among the over 50,000 'indirect deaths' were those abducted and killed in captivity by various Islamic Jihadists; classified as "victims of the enforced disappearances". In Law and Criminology, 'Enforced Disappearances' and 'Torture' have no excuses or exonerative defenses at perpetration and can be perpetrated by state actors or non state actors or someone or individuals sanctioned by a state actor or state actors.

According to available local and international statistics, “Boko Haram and allied others have been responsible for abduction and disappearance of at least 22,500 mainly defenseless Christians between 2009 and 2014”; during which “they also wantonly destroyed or burned down 13,000 churches and 1500 Christian schools, directly killed between 11,500 and 12,500 Christians and forced over 1.3m others to flee to avoid being hacked to death or forcefully converted to Islam” (Ms. Anne Mulder and Open Doors USA: 2015). Between 2016 and 2023; a period of eight years, more than 30,000 defenseless civilians were abducted by Islamic Jihadists and, some say, ‘Islamic-inspired’ security forces in Nigeria. The abducted over 30,000 were never returned alive till date. In all, Christians accounted for roughly 100,000 of the ‘direct deaths’ and ‘indirect deaths’ of the over 50,000 while moderate Muslims accounted for about 46,000 and members of other religions accounted for the remaining 4,000 defenseless civilian deaths.

- **‘Fourteen Genocides’ (Ongoing) And ‘Seven Warning Genocides’ In The World:** According to ‘the International Alliance against Genocide’, of which Intersociety is a member since 2020, “today’s world is gripped and devastated by ‘Fourteen Genocides’ (ongoing) and ‘Six Warning Genocides’ and they include Renewed Genocide in Darfur and Sudan, Jihadist Genocide of Christians in Nigeria, Russian Genocide in Ukraine, Slow Genocide of Hazara Shias in Afghanistan, Assad Regime and Turkish Genocides in Syria, Genocide in North Korea, Genocides of ethnic minorities in Myanmar, the Genocide of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and India, Chinese Genocide of Uyghur Muslims, Hamas Genocide of Israelis; War Crimes in Gaza, Genocide in Ethiopia, Genocide in Democratic Republic of Congo and Genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan-Armenia/Artsakh). On the other hand, the ‘Seven Warning Genocides’ include Warning Genocide over Azerbaijani aggression in Syunik Province in the Republic of Armenia and Warning Genocides in India, Pakistan and Iran and the Iranian-backed terrorism by Houthis in Yemen; and Saudi, UAE, and Qatar support for Wahhabi jihadist terrorism
- **Jihadists And ‘Islamist Security Forces’ Killed 8,222 Christians In 2023:** The combined forces of the Government protected Islamic Jihadists and the country’s Security Forces (**NSFc**) are directly and vicariously accountable for hacking to death in 2023 of no fewer than 8,222 defenseless Christians-covering a period of 13 months or Jan (2023)-Jan (2024), out of which Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen were responsible for at least 5,100 Christian deaths, Boko Haram and their allies 500 deaths, Jihadist Fulani Bandits 1,600 deaths and ‘Islamic-inspired’ security forces 1000 Christian deaths. Among the non state actor deaths were about 840 or roughly 10% of the 8,400 abducted Christians killed in captivity or never returned alive. The death of 8,222 defenseless Christians and abduction of over 8,400 others in 13 months or Jan 1, 2023 to Jan 1, 2024 marked the deadliest in recent years principally occasioned by woeful failure of the Government of Nigeria and the country’s security forces to rise to the occasion and tacit support and protection they are strongly and widely believed to have rendered to the Jihadists particularly the Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen politically and financially backed by the Miyatti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and the Fulani Nationality Movement (FUNAM). The alarming increase in the number of Christian deaths and their houses and sacred places of worship and learning burned down or wantonly destroyed in 2023, as against the 2022’s 5,068 Christian deaths; was also widely seen as “a farewell gift to the genocidal Government of Retired Major General Muhammad Buhari” and “a welcome gift’ to the new Central Government of Nigeria under “Muslim-Muslim Presidential ticket”.

In Jan 2024 alone, at least 200 defenseless Christians were slaughtered across Nigeria including more than 50 deaths recorded in Plateau State. The 2023 anti Christian killings had occurred in not less than 1000 crime scene attacks during which not less than 500 Churches and estimated 200 Traditional Religious Sanctuaries were ferociously attacked, burned down or wantonly destroyed or violently shut down. The no fewer than 500 attacked churches were also gravely threatened and forced to be deserted. In Bokokos County of Plateau State alone, not less than 25 churches have been affected since the Dec 23, 2023 attacks and 102 communal Christian villages sacked and over 1300 Christian houses razed. Not less than 300-400 Christian communities in Plateau State have been uprooted and sacked by Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen in recent years’ attacks including burning or wanton destruction of over 10,000 Christian homes by Government-protected Fulani Jihadists assembled from Bauchi, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Zamfara, Borno, etc.

Introduction

1. CSW-UK is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). CSW Nigeria advocates for and assists victims of religion-related violence in Nigeria.
2. This submission seeks to highlight concerns regarding the situation of FoRB and related rights and freedoms.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

3. During the reporting period Christian communities in Shari'a states continued to experience marginalization, discrimination, and socioeconomic deprivations that derogate from constitutional provisions, including denial of worship places in federal educational institutions and seizures and demolitions of properties on spurious grounds.
4. For example, in October 2021 the Kaduna State government demolished without compensation 263 buildings in the predominantly Christian Gracelands community in Zaria, including six churches, a small mosque and a school complex, despite a court ruling against demolition in at least one instance. In June 2022 a chapel under construction at Kaduna State University, approved in 2014 by the University's Governing Council, was demolished.
5. Immediately prior to leaving office, former Kaduna State governor Nasir El-Rufai ordered the demolition of over 900 buildings. 21 May 2023 saw the demolition of properties belonging to the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), a minority Shi'a faith group in the Rigasa area. Next, the Gbagyi Villa residential complex in the predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna City was targeted, beginning with the demolition of the Alheri Baptist Church on 22 May.
6. At least eight people were killed, and several others wounded, including a 12-year-old girl, when the Kaduna State Vigilante Service (KADSVIS), a group created by El-Rufai, opened fire on protesting residents as demolitions continued in defiance of a court order. One victim, Luka Enoch, suffered 11 gunshot wounds, and a woman reportedly died of shock as demolitions began.
7. The former governor regularly used inciting language targeting specific religious communities. In a viral video that emerged in June 2023 he addressed a group of Muslim clerics and the incoming governor on his penultimate day in office, speaking extensively on how the All Progressives Congress (APC) had successfully utilised religion, including by running on a Muslim-Muslim ticket, to secure electoral victory at state and federal level: 'What we are able to achieve in Kaduna, we've now achieved on the national level' – a reference to the APC's disputed victory in the February presidential elections, in which they jettisoned the tradition of a mixed faith presidential ticket for a Muslim-Muslim one.
8. El-Rufai described deceiving members of the Christian

community who bemoaned the lack of inclusivity by informing them religion was not a factor, when in reality it was. He continued: 'No liar will contest as a Christian and win elections ever again. ... That is when everyone will understand and say "Okay, we understand, we know our status"... This is the only way to have peace in this land.'

9. Minority Muslim communities also experienced violations. In its last UPR Nigeria supported a recommendation regarding the release from arbitrary detention of IMN leader Ibrahim El Zakzaky and his wife Zeenat and holding the killers of 374 IMN members accountable. Although a commission of inquiry set up by the Kaduna state government requested the prosecution of soldiers responsible for these killings, this did not occur.
10. Instead, the Kaduna State government charged the Zakzakys with eight counts in connection to the 2015 attack on their home, including culpable homicide, unlawful assembly, and disruption of public peace. Protests by unarmed IMN members demanding the release of the couple, who are elderly and unwell, regularly met with lethal violence, contravening Nigeria's UPR undertakings regarding FoRB and peaceful assembly, and the IMN remains proscribed in Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Plateau and Sokoto States, undermining freedom of association.
11. The Zakzakys were eventually acquitted of all charges in July 2021, but deprived of passports. Unarmed protests demanding the return of their passports to enable them to travel for treatment abroad and IMN religious marches also met with violence. In September 2021, at least two people were killed in Abuja when security forces opened fire on IMN members marking Ashura. The authorities later claimed they had been 'unruly and riotous,' and denied anyone had been killed.
12. In August 2022, the IMN reported that at least six IMN members were killed and 40 injured during the Ashura procession in Zaria. Then in March 2023, six men were killed while protesting in Rigasa, Kaduna City, amid claims by the former governor that his convoy was attacked, a claim similar to the one made by the former Chief of Army Staff which preceded the deadly December 2015 assault on IMN properties.
13. Followers of traditional African religions recently experienced restrictions on their right to FoRB. In a recent example, when Yeye Ajesikemi Omolara, a priestess of the Yoruba religion Obatala and member of the Kwara state Association of Traditional Religion (also known as Isese), announced in early July that the 2023 festival would take place from 22 to 24 July in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital, members of the Majlisu Shabab li Ulamahu Society, an Islamic group, stormed her residence and warned her not to hold the festival.
14. The Emir of Ilorin's spokesperson later stated the event was cancelled to prevent a crisis, as Muslims in Ilorin opposed idolatry. By 10 July a group named the Ancient

Religion Societies of African Descendants International Council (ARSADIC) released a statement to the effect that traditional worshipers would not tolerate the infringement of the rights of their fellow adherents. The situation remained unresolved at time of writing.

Recommendations

15. **Federal and State authorities must fulfil FoRB in its entirety, recognising it as a non-derogable right, penalising and ending discrimination based on religion, and advancing social cohesion by promoting and protecting FoRB for all.**
16. **Nigeria must ensure the availability of worship facilities for each religious persuasion in relevant federal facilities, including in schools, colleges, and universities.**
17. **Nigeria must ensure that states fully compensate religious communities whose places of worship, homes and businesses have been demolished, facilitating access to viable alternative land if this is required.**

Right to Effective Remedy

18. Nigeria supported several recommendations regarding combating extremism and terrorism and protecting citizens. However, civilians are attacked at will by armed non-state actors for whom religion and/or ethnicity are either instrumentalised as rallying points or are *raison d'être*.
19. Farming communities in central states increasingly experience lethal attacks by irregular armed groups of Fulani extraction. In 2020 the Boko Haram terrorist faction secured alliances with armed groups in northwestern and central states, and in 2021 some of its fighters and bomb makers relocated to forests in predominantly Christian southern Kaduna. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and al Qaeda affiliate Ansaru secured similar alliances.
20. The alliances resulted in significant violence. For example, in August 2021 Kaduna State witnessed an attack on the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA). Two officers were killed, several sustained gunshot injuries and a senior officer was abducted for ransom. In May 2022 the Abuja-Kaduna train was attacked and passengers were abducted for ransom. In July 2022 all 68 Boko Haram members detained in Kuje Prison, Abuja, were released in an attack that met no resistance. This violence now affects every region, including the south. In the northwest it takes on a primarily ethnic character.
21. A government gazette published in January 2022 designated these non-state actors, 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.'
22. The first terrorist attack on a church in southern Nigeria occurred on 5 June 2022. Forty-one people were killed when assailants identified by survivors as being of Fulani ethnicity invaded St Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, during Pentecost Sunday mass.
23. Following a noticeable decrease in violence during the electoral period, communities across Nigeria are experiencing a renewed surge, particularly in Benue, Plateau and southern Kaduna States. Around 400 people were killed in Benue State within a three-week period in April 2023, as communities in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) came under attack. Victims included children, pregnant women and people displaced by earlier violence sheltering in a makeshift camp in a local school.
24. Between 11 March and 15 April over 70 people were killed in Zangon Kataf LGA in southern Kaduna State, and an unknown number displaced in four attacks on separate localities. In Plateau State around 130 people were killed in attacks on over 23 communities in the Mangu and Riyom LGAs which began on 15 May. By the first week of July, 231 people had died in Mangu LGA within a two-month period.
25. Predominantly Christian areas in central Nigeria also experience kidnappings for ransom almost daily. In November 2022 CSW interviewed former abductees from southern Kaduna whose experiences bore similarities. Following abduction by Fulani assailants, they were force-marched for hours before reaching forest camps, with any stragglers assaulted severely or killed. Camps are characterised by casual brutality, frequent beatings, mutilations, and executions, often after extortionate payments are made.
26. Female and male abductees, young and old, suffer sexual violence, including gang rape. Psychological torture does not end once released, as many still receive random calls from former captors on phones used during ransom negotiations.
27. Congregants, and especially church leaders, are targeted for abduction for ransom and murder. On 7 February 2022 armed men raided the home of Rev Fr Joseph Danjuma Shekari of St Monica's Catholic Church, Ikulu Parish, abducted him and killed his cook, a secondary school student. They also stole around 2 million Naira (approximately US\$ 2,578) donated during a thanksgiving service, and other valuables. The reverend was released on 8 February.
28. On 8 March 2022 Rev Fr Joseph Aketeh Bako was seized from St. John's Catholic Church, Kudenda in Kaduna state. His death, following severe mistreatment, was announced on 24 April. Rev Fr Leo Raphael Ozigi, parish priest of St. Mary's Church in Sarakin Pawa Village, Niger State, was kidnapped on 27 March and released on 8 April. Rev Fr Felix Zakari Fidson, parish priest of St. Ann's Catholic Church in Zaria, was abducted on 24 March on his way to the Diocesan headquarters, and was released on 3 May.
29. On 25 May 2022 armed men broke into the rectory of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, in the Kafur LGA of Katsina

State, kidnapping parish priest, Rev Fr Stephen Ojapa (MSP, Missionary Society of Saint Paul of Nigeria), his assistant Rev Fr Oliver Okpara, and two boys who were also in the church at that time.

30. On 29 May 2022, the Prelate of Methodist Church Nigeria, the Bishop of Owerri, and the Prelate's Chaplain were abducted by eight gunmen of Fulani ethnicity whilst on an official visit to Abia State. They were assaulted, tortured, threatened, and eventually released on 30 May following payment of 100 million Naira (around US\$ 128,938) in ransom.
31. On 4 June 2022, Rev Fr Christopher Onotu, parish priest of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church Obangede in Okene, Kogi State, was abducted. On 14 June gunmen attacked the Celestial Church of Christ, in Ewekoro LGA of Abeokuta, Ogun State, abducting the assistant parish leader and a Sunday School teacher. Their captors demanded a ransom of 50 million Naira (approximately US\$ 644,694)
32. On 4 January 2023 the parish priest of St. George Omu-Ekiti Catholic Church in Oye, Ekiti State, Rev Fr Michael Olubunmi Olofinlade, was abducted while returning from a pastoral assignment.
33. On 15 January 2023 Rev Father Isaac Achi, parish priest of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church in the Kafin Koro community in Niger State and chair of the local chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), was burned beyond recognition when armed assailants set his rectory ablaze after failing to enter forcibly. Rev Fr Collins Omeh was shot while escaping the burning building, and later treated in hospital. In 2011 Rev Fr Achi survived the Christmas Day bombing of St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, Niger State. The Madalla bomber was among Boko Haram escapees from Kuje Prison in July 2022.
34. In Katsina state, terrorists on motorcycles attacked the morning service of Global Mission Church in Kankara LGA on 15 January 2023, abducting 25 worshippers, and severely assaulting and injuring the church pastor when he attempted to intervene.
35. On 1 July 2023, armed assailants attacked a Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) prayer service in Ogun State, killing the pastor and abducting seven members of the church.

Recommendations

36. ***Nigeria must provide immediate and effective protection for communities targeted by terrorist violence in accordance with its constitutional obligations under Section 14 (2) (b), addressing every source of violence decisively, regardless of the religion, belief or ethnicity of perpetrators or victims, and ensuring the return of all abductees.***
37. ***Nigeria is encouraged to respond positively to the visit request by the Special Rapporteur on Internally Displaced Persons, encouraging her to visit IDPs***

in central states as well as those in the northeast, and to also invite the UNSG's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to visit affected central states.

Ethnicity-based Discrimination, Right to Vote

38. Nigeria's ruling party aggravated the country's most sensitive fault lines before and after recent elections, by jettisoning the traditional mixed-faith presidential ticket and targeting the Igbo tribe through ethnicity-laced rhetoric, while projecting its own religious exclusivity on the Igbo presidential candidate of the Labour Party which, along with the main opposition, had a mixed-faith presidential ticket.
39. In Lagos State thugs were deployed to snatch ballots and assault opposition voters, targeting those who were, or were assumed to be of Igbo extraction, even in their homes. In a viral video prior to the elections, Musiliu Akinsanya, the Lagos State Parks Management Committee Chairman and notorious thug leader also known as MC Oluomo, warned Igbos in Lagos to stay home if they were not voting for ruling party candidates. No action was taken to hold him accountable.
40. A proliferation of inflammatory ethnicity-laced rhetoric from APC supporters on social media alleging, amongst other things, that Igbos had declared Lagos a 'no man's land' and sought to seize it from the indigenous Yoruba tribe, further heightened tensions. Even the Labour Party gubernatorial candidate, whose wife is Igbo, was declared an Igbo, despite his family being among the original inhabitants of Lagos.
41. Both before and after the elections, markets, and shops in areas of Lagos assumed to be predominantly Igbo were set on fire. A 65-year-old security guard died, and traders lost everything they owned when shops in the Akere Auto Parts Market were set on fire on 2 March, and one person died when a fire broke out on 28 March at Balogun Market, affecting three buildings and over 900 shops. The baseless animosity against Igbos and ethnicity-laced pronouncements on social media continue, including from government spokespersons.

Recommendations

42. ***Nigeria must respect the principle of non-discrimination as articulated in relevant national and international legislation, guarantee the right to vote, and penalise purveyors of ethnicity-laced rhetoric and violence.***

Blasphemy and Impunity

43. Nigeria's colonial era law punishes blasphemy with a two-year sentence. Additionally, the enactment of Shari'a penal codes by 12 states since 2001 allowed Shari'a courts to arrogate jurisdiction constitutionally reserved for criminal courts over capital sentences, and to issue punishments contravening Nigeria's obligations under the CAT, effectively creating a de facto state religion in violation of its secular Constitution.
44. There is a strong correlation between blasphemy

laws, extremism, and mob violence, with perpetrators enjoying impunity. On 12 May 2022 Christian student Deborah Emmanuel was lynched at her school in Sokoto State following a blasphemy accusation. Her murder was widely justified, and even celebrated, by a variety of lesser known and prominent Muslim individuals on social media, including by the Deputy Chief Imam of Abuja's National Mosque.

45. The only two men arrested amongst the mob that killed Ms Emmanuel were charged with 'public disturbance' as opposed to murder, and were freed in January 2023 on the grounds that the prosecution had regularly failed to attend court hearings, and according to the presiding judge, even when they were present, they were not serious in prosecuting the case.
46. Ms Emmanuel's extrajudicial killing triggered a spate of blasphemy accusations in which two people lost their lives. In Borno State, police hurriedly arrested Naomi Goni, a Christian student at Ramat Polytechnic, Maiduguri, following accusations she made blasphemous statements while commenting about Ms Emmanuel's death on a Facebook page she had reportedly lost to hackers a year earlier.
47. On 20 May Rhoda Jatau, a 40-year-old Christian woman who shared a video condemning Ms Emmanuel's murder on WhatsApp, was arrested in Bauchi State, as angry youth attacked the Christian community, injuring several people, including a pastor, and burning homes and businesses. Mrs Jatau has been held without bail for over a year, charged under sections 114 and 210 of the State Penal Code, and Section 24 Subsection 1 b(i) of the Cybercrime Prohibition Act of 2015 with inciting public disturbance, exciting the contempt of a religious creed, and cyberstalking. Her safety is not guaranteed, with reports circulating that extremists intend to waylay and kill her enroute to or from court.
48. On 4 June 2022, Ahmad Usman, a 30-year-old Muslim vigilante, was immolated at a fruit market in Abuja for alleged blasphemy. On or around 14 June 2022, three northerners named Abubakar Musa, Sarauta Monsur, and Surajo Yusuf stabbed, beat, and immolated sex worker Hannah Saliu in Lagos, after finding a Quran under her pillow.
49. On 20 June 2023 market trader and successful butcher Usman Buda was lynched in Sokoto State following an unproven allegation that he blasphemed during an argument with a fellow market trader. A devout member of the Salafi Izala movement, his friends insisted Mr Buda would never have blasphemed, and attributed his murder to jealousy on the part of competitors, highlighting that a butcher who lost business due to his popularity no longer has any competition.
50. On 10 August 2020 a Shari'a court in Kano State sentenced Tijjaniyya Sufi singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, then aged 22, to death for allegedly blaspheming in a song he shared via WhatsApp. On 21 January 2021 the appellate division of the Kano state High Court overturned the sentence,

citing procedural irregularities, and ordered a retrial. Mr Sharif-Aminu's lawyers asked the Kano Court of Appeal to rule on whether the High Court was wrong to order a retrial, arguing their client should be discharged and acquitted. They also stated the High Court was wrong in not declaring Kano State's Sharia Penal Code inconsistent with Nigeria's secular Constitution.

51. On 17 August 2022, in a worrying split decision, the Court of Appeal upheld both the legality of the Shari'a Penal Code, and the decision of the lower court to quash the original sentence due to irregularities and order a retrial. Mr Sharif-Aminu's lawyers are currently challenging Nigeria's blasphemy law and the constitutionality of Kano State's Shari'a Penal Code at the Supreme Court.
52. On 5 April 2022 President of the Nigerian Humanist Society Mubarak Bala received a 24-year sentence from a Kano State High Court. Mr Bala has been incarcerated since 28 April 2020. He was arrested when a law firm in Kano petitioned the Kano State Police Commissioner, accusing him of insulting Islam on Facebook. Held incommunicado for the first 162 days, Mr Bala spent 462 days in prison before being formally charged.

Recommendations

53. ***Nigeria is encouraged to repeal the blasphemy law, review and revoke excessive sentences, and uphold the supremacy of the Constitution by bringing state laws and practices into conformity with it, and with the nation's obligations under international law.***
54. ***Nigeria must tackle impunity surrounding blasphemy accusations by penalising purveyors of false allegations and bringing inciters and perpetrators of violence to justice.***

Peaceful Assembly, Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom

55. On 20 October 2020 Nigerian security forces opened fire on unarmed and peaceful demonstrators who had gathered at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos to protest brutality of the notorious police unit, the Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS), and to request good governance and the rule of law. Soldiers opened fire as protestors finished singing the national anthem. When they withdrew, the police arrived and also opened fire.
56. The extrajudicial killing of a young man in Delta State had served as the tipping point for the #EndSARS protests, which broke out in southern Nigeria and Abuja, and evolved into a cry against corruption, nepotism and injustices blighting the lives of young people. Over a week after the protests began in the south and centre, cities in the north also saw protests that included a call for an end to the insecurity and terrorism wracking the region, using the additional hashtag #SecureTheNorth.
57. Initial estimates of casualties at Lekki Toll Gate ranged from nine to over 70. Video footage subsequently emerged appearing to confirm survivors' allegations that soldiers had evacuated corpses from the scene in