



Universal Periodic Review 45<sup>th</sup> session - Stakeholders Report

## **Nigeria: Violence, Insecurity and Protection of the Population**

18 July 2023

**Submission by:**

World Evangelical Alliance

Open Doors International

Nigeria Evangelical Fellowship

**The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)** is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

**Open Doors International (ODI)** is an international NGO that supports communities of Christians from all denominations in more than 60 countries where their fundamental rights are violated because of their faith.

**Nigeria Evangelical Fellowship (NEF)** is a Christian interdenominational body of churches based in Abuja, Nigeria. The NEF is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance.

For additional information, please contact Geneva Office of the WEA at [geneva@worldea.org](mailto:geneva@worldea.org).

## Contents

### Introduction3

### Part 1: Violence, Insecurity and Impunity3

Recommendations in the previous UPR cycle3

The rise of violence of armed Fulani herdsmen3

Examples of Violence and Widespread Killings4

A Pattern of Government Impotence and Impunity10

Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria11

### Part 2: Blasphemy Laws and the Lynching of Blasphemy Suspects12

## Acronyms

LGA Local Government Area

UPR Universal Periodic Review

ECWA Evangelical Church Winning All

## Introduction

The following report addresses violations to the right to life stemming from widespread violence and killings by armed non-state actors and insecurity in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, where the primary actors are armed Fulani herdsmen. Our report also addresses the impact of blasphemy laws in several Nigerian states on the right to freedom of religion and the right to freedom of expression, as well as the right to life.

Information for this report was gathered through Christian leaders in areas affected by violence in Nigeria, as well as through partner organizations of the World Evangelical Alliance and Open Doors International. Dozens of people were interviewed, including victims, relatives of victims, religious leaders and community leaders.

## Part 1: Violence, Insecurity and Impunity

### Recommendations in the previous UPR cycle

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle review of Nigeria in November 2018, Nigeria received and supported recommendations related to intercommunal violence and the protection of life and property. Two key recommendations supported by Nigeria were *“regarding recurring intercommunal violence, undertake effective and impartial investigations into massacres, bringing those responsible to justice and ensuring redress for victims”* and *“intensify efforts to eradicate impunity by strengthening accountability and the rule of law, particularly through monitoring, investigating and reporting on human rights abuses, and to ensure that all alleged perpetrators, in particular those affiliated with the official security forces, are brought to justice”*.

Additional recommendations that were supported include:

- Take all necessary measures to protect the lives of civilians, while fighting insurgency;
- Strengthen existing measures to better counter the spread of radicalization in the country;
- Sustain efforts in strengthening its legal and institutional frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Continue efforts in the context of the program to combat violent extremism by giving particular attention to strengthening a culture of tolerance and moderation.

Regrettably, and as we will discuss in the present report, Nigeria has failed to follow suit on the accepted recommendations.

### The rise of violence of armed Fulani herdsmen

Nigeria faces multiple security threats across its territory, with insecurity deepening in the north, the middle belt, and south of the country. Fulani violence mainly targets the middle belt. The country is home to more than 250 ethnic groups, and ethnicity and religion have long presented challenges

to nation-building. Under the Constitution, Nigeria is a secular state with no official state religion. Despite that, in 1999, Sharia law was introduced in the north and is now established in 12 states.<sup>i</sup>

Alongside the violence and terrorism of Islamist armed groups of Boko Haram and ISWAP, the recent decade has seen a rise of a deadlier, diffused and dangerous violence in Nigeria. In Nigeria's Middle Belt region, and increasingly beyond that, ethnic Fulani herdsmen attack predominantly Christian villages, abducting, raping and killing people, destroying buildings and harvests or occupying farmlands.<sup>ii</sup> Fulani herdsmen are armed with AK-47, assault rifles and other weapons that are inaccessible to the other communities including Christian farmers.

While the violence has complex and often disputed root causes, it has intensified ethnic and religious divisions. Adding to the insecurity are attacks by other armed criminals, commonly referred to as 'bandits', who engage in cattle rustling, mass abduction of school children, kidnap for ransom and pillaging of villages.<sup>iii</sup> The insurgencies and conflict have forced more than 3 million Nigerians to flee their homes.<sup>iv</sup>

## **Examples of Violence and Widespread Killings**

We hereby share cases of violence and killings spanning 2019 to the present researched by our partners in the field. These examples represent the tip of the iceberg of the everyday reality of violence, killings and abduction faced by Christian communities across Nigeria.

### *14 April 2019, Akwanga LGA, Nassarawa state*

At about 9:00 pm, Armed Fulani herdsmen invaded Kochum-Numa, Andaha, Akwanga local Government area of Nassarawa State, north central Nigeria. The assailants who arrived at the community, massacred 17 people at a late-night naming ceremony, those murdered in this attack include the parents of the child, reports indicate that several other persons sustained various degree of injuries.

### *26 February 2019, Karmai, Kaduna state*

Fulani militants said to be in their hundreds invaded Karmai community in the early hours of Tuesday 26 February, killing forty people and burning hundreds of houses including, an Evangelical Church Wining All (ECWA) auditorium in Karmai.

### *6 March 2019, Gwer-west LGA, Benue state*

Armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Tsegesa and Tsebukem Villages in Gwer-west LGA, Benue state. These villages were surrounded at about 10:00 am Wednesday morning, the attackers opened fire on the communities and killed 30 persons and set 20 houses ablaze.

### *11 March 2019, Kajuru LGA, Kaduna state*

52 people were killed and around 100 homes were destroyed in attacks on Inkirimi and Dogonnoma villages in Maro, Kajuru LGA Kaduna state. The victims included men, women and children. When the attackers came, they divided themselves into three groups; one group was shooting, another set houses on fire as people ran away, and the third waited in the bush to intercept fleeing villagers. Most of the people were killed while trying to escape.

### *8 January 2020, Mangu, Plateau state*

A group of Fulani herdsmen attacked Kulben in Kombun district, killing 13 persons. The attackers who arrived in their numbers chanting “Allahu Akbar” shot sporadically at fleeing villagers. Ten persons lost their lives on the spot while three others died from their gunshot wounds while receiving treatment in the hospital.

*26 January 2020, Bokkos LGA, Plateau state*

Fulani herdsmen numbering over 200 arrived at the in Kwatas, Ruboi and Marish of Bokkos LGA on Sunday 26 January at about 9:00pm. The heavily armed Fulani herdsmen opened fire on community members shooting and killing 18 persons in Kwatas and setting many houses on fire. The following morning, Monday 27 January, the attackers moved to Marish and Ruboi villages, killing four other persons, and setting more than 45 homes ablaze. Three churches were also burnt down by the attack.

*2 April 2020, Miango, Plateau state*

Armed Fulani herdsmen attacked communities in Irigwe land for two consecutive weeks reaching Hukke community. Seven people were burnt to death in Hukke from an overnight attack, the attackers arrived in the community in the night and started shooting sporadically. Many of the villagers ran to the nearby bushes for safety. Four aged members of the community who were not able to run were caught and burnt alive. Three others were also burnt in different locations in and around Hukke Village a small town outside of Jos, the capital of Plateau state.

*19 July 2020, Kaura LGA, Kaduna*

21 were shot death at wedding party In Kukum Daji Village in Kaura LGA. The President of the Community, Mr. Yashen Titus said that suspected herdsmen invaded the venue of a wedding party in the community at about 10p.m., Sunday night, and that the suspected herdsmen opened fire on the people who attended the party. He added that 19 people died on the spot while two others later died at the hospital.

*20 July 2020, Owan West LGA, Edo state*

Suspected Fulani herdsmen killed three people and injured dozen others on their farms in Sobe community in Owan West LGA of Edo State. Among those killed were a pastor and two of his farm workers. A source reported that the latest attack was the fifth in the series of Militia attacks on the Christian agrarian community since January 2020.

*23 January 2021, Danko Wassagu LGA, Kebbi state*

A group of armed Fulani herdsmen, numbering about fifty, attacked the Village of Muhaye, in Danko Wassagu local government area of Kebbi State. The attack happened in broad daylight while some of the villagers were working on their farms. Twenty corpses were burnt beyond recognition and were buried hurriedly in a shallow grave in Muhaye. The remaining twenty-three corpses were taken in protest to the palace of the paramount ruler and king of the Zuru people as a sign of displeasure at the massacre and abductions of Christians in Muhaye. More than hundred women and Children were taken away to the forest by the Fulani militants. The entire village with more than fifty houses was burnt down, they destroyed all farm harvest and took away the livestock.

*30 May 2021, Ado LGA, Benue state*

In the early hours of Sunday 30 May, armed men believed to be a group of Fulani herdsmen in their hundreds concomitantly attacked several communities of Ado LGA, the attack left 60 persons dead. 30 bodies were first discovered in seven communities with another 30 corpses found scattered in

the nearby bushes. The villages attacked included Ndigwe, Ataloga, Odokem, Ekile, Nduobasi, Ekpufu and Obakota.

*24 August 2021, Jos, Plateau state*

Fulani herdsmen attacked a small Christian village of Yelwan Zangam and killed 36 including 16 members of one family who were burnt alive in Yelwan Zangam. The community is located 5 kms on the outskirts of Jos, the capital of Plateau state in Central Nigeria. It has an estimate of about 200 members from the Anaguta tribe, all living on inherited land.

*21 March 2022, Kagoro, Kaduna state*

Heavily armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Agban village, Kagoro, Kaduna State and killed 34 Christians, and destroyed or damaged hundreds of houses and shops and 4 churches. The attack took place around 8:00 pm and continued for two to three hours without security intervention. Fulani militants were estimated to be more than 100 on motorcycles and cars. Casualties would have been higher in Agban if it was not for an early warning. People were alerted of the sighting of armed Fulani herdsmen. Therefore many did not sleep in their houses.

*17 April 2022, Takum LGA, Taraba state*

An attack by Fulani herdsmen combined with Boko Haram elements, in a series of attacks on predominantly Christian villages on Easter Sunday, has claimed the lives of 122 Christians. On Sunday 17 April 2022, at about 4:30 am, predominantly Fulani herdsmen and some believed to be members of Boko Haram equipped with AK47, machetes, and other weapons attacked a series of villages. They first attacked Rikwentxen community and killed thirty people. They proceeded to Kpanshe community where they killed ten people. In Kasheten community fifteen people were killed. Shemta community twenty people were killed. In Kwari, they killed seven people. In Basang ten people were killed. In Tati, twenty people were murdered, and in Tswan 1 and 2, ten people were killed. Properties and houses were burnt down.

*5 June 2022, Kajuru LGA, Kaduna state*

32 Adara Christians lost their lives in an attack on four communities of Ungwan Gamu, Dogon Noma, Ungwan Sarki, and Maikori villages in Kajuru, Kaduna State. The attack was carried out by Fulani Militants on more than 150 motorcycles, each carrying more than one armed person.

*18 December 2022, Kaura LGA, Kaduna state*

Armed Fulani herdsmen invaded Mallagum, Kaura LGA, Kaduna State. The assailants killed 34 people and burnt 96 houses. They invaded the village chanting "Allahu-Akbar" around 10:00 p.m. on 18 December while the people were sleeping and started killing and burning houses and properties worth millions. An attempt to burn down Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) failed, but some properties in the Church including a car parked in the premises were burnt down. A local source confirmed that the attackers mounted a roadblock on the highway at both ends of the Kafanchan - Kaduna Road, preventing any form of assistance from coming to the rescue of the helpless victims.

*15 January 2023, Paikoro LGA, Niger state*

Rev. Fr Isaac Achi the parish priest of Saint Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Kafin Koro who was also the Dean of Kafin Koro Deanery in the Catholic Diocese of Minna and the Chairman of the local branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was burned to death in the early hours of 15 January. Gunmen believed by locals to be Fulani bandits attacked his parish house at exactly 3:00 a.m. His colleague Fr. Collins Omeh who survived the attack with a gunshot injury on his shoulder, narrated that the attackers attacked the compound around 3:00 a.m. but could not gain access

inside, so they decided to set the entire house on fire with the two clergymen inside. Collins further narrated to our source that before his death Fr Isaac discovered that both were losing blood having been hit by bullets trying to keep doors locked against the invaders. Collins was able to escape the attack and received treatment in a hospital in Niger state. Before his death, Fr Isaac was a vocal critic of the Government's handling of violent attacks on the church in Niger state and north-central Nigeria, he had also been a vocal defender of the Church against the Fulani herdsmen.

*22 January 2023, Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi state*

At 2:00 a.m. on 22 January, Fulani herdsmen stormed Gambar Sabon Layi, a Christian community on the outskirts of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area of Bauchi State. They began shooting indiscriminately. Four people were killed, three injured and one person remains missing at the time that this report. Among those killed was the community leader (Chief). Before the deadly attack, several threats had been issued to the community demanding that its leader should vacate his residence which is located at the top of a hill in the community and above what was suspected to be their hideout.

*23 March 2023, Shiroro LGA, Niger state*

On 23rd March 2023 at exactly 2:00 am, armed Fulani militants stormed Dnalagwa, Apuluwyi and Sabon Gida kurebe under Erena Districts of Shiroro LGA. The rampaging Fulani herdsmen, wielding various types of assault weapons, killed six, raped 17 women plus 9 girls, 56 were kidnapped and moved to an unknown destination. At the time of compiling these reports nothing has been heard of the people abducted. Respondents pointed out that Christians in Munya, Shiroro, and in other parts of Niger State have continued to grind under severe levels of violence in the last decade, mainly from Fulani herdsmen attacking predominantly Christian villages.

*7 April 2023, Guma LGA, Benue state*

At 9:00 pm local time, 32 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were killed in a late-night attack on LGEA Primary School, Mgbani, Nyiev Council Ward, Guma LGA by suspected armed Fulani herdsmen. The IDPs fled the Fulani attacks from various villages around Guma Local Government and took refuge in a primary school that until this attack was believed to be safe.

*15 May 2023, Mangu LGA, Plateau state*

38 deaths were recorded from two communities of Fungzai and neighboring Kubat in the newly created district of Bwai in the Mangu LGA. Armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Kubat on Monday night setting houses on fire. They also attacked fleeing members leading to the death of some residents while others were injured. Members of neighboring Fungzai community, who saw the burning Kubat village, mobilized women and children to flee from the attackers who started advancing to the community after the attack on Kubat. The herdsmen shot or attacked with machete over twenty people attempting to escape, mostly children and women. Many bodies were also recovered at various location in and around the scene of the attack. Our field contacts reported 38 Christians killed. However, on Monday 22 May, the BBC reported that the unrest had spread to other communities in the Mangu LGA. A community leader told the BBC that "the gunmen invaded up to 17 villages" and that there were at least 85 people who died.

Together with our partners in the field, we have identified two LGAs that show the sort of violence that Christian communities are facing across Nigeria. Bassa LGA in Plateau state and Zangon Kataf LGA in Kaduna state are examples of Christian majority localities that have come under sustained, multi-year and intense assaults from armed Fulani herdsmen causing internal displacement of thousands of individuals. In the following presentation of incidents of violence, we have clustered

these attacks by LGA as examples of the kind and scale of violence that the government of Nigeria has not been able to prevent, nor protect civilians from.

### ***Bassa LGA, Plateau state***

- On 23 February 2020, Christians in the settlements of Kpachudu and Jeddu were separately attacked by armed Fulani herdsmen, with two fatalities.
- On 6 March 2020, armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Huttu, Zirshe Dundu, Kperie, Miango Town and Ancha, and killed nine Christians.
- On 14 April 2020, armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Hwrra and killed 15 people.
- In Zowru on 21 July 2021, armed Fulani herdsmen destroyed the farmlands of 25 families.
- On 14 February 2021, armed Fulani herdsmen attacked members of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Rikwe-Chongu and Zirshe (Ntireku). Four ECWA members were ambushed at Ri-Bakwa axis near Kpachudu while returning to their community, Rikwe-Chongu. Three of them were killed, one sustained gunshot injuries. A member of the same denomination was ambushed and killed in Zirshe Ntireku instantly; houses and food grains were burnt.
- Every day between 20 May 2021 and 26 May 2021, armed Fulani herdsmen were able to attack Christians individually and collectively, in and around settlements in the Bassa LGA: Rikwe-Rishe, Ri-Bakwa, Dong, Kwi, Kpatenvie, Binchin, Meyango, Rafiki, Nkienwhie/Zanwra and Ncha.
- In August 2021, the inhabitants of Chwuye, Ntiroku (angwan Magaji), Isho (Kishisho), Gyeh(Kigam), Kangbro, Hwrra, Zirshe, Maiyanga and Dundu all in Kwall and Zanwra, Nche-Tahu, Rikwe-Rishe A & B, Ri-Dogo, Nchu-Nzhwa, Kpachudu, Kpara, Gene, Kpatenvie, and Kpachudu came under sustained attack, again for some such as those living in Rikwe-Rishe and Kpatenvie. The armed Fulani herdsmen attacked for several days, in large numbers and at different times of the day. Farm crops were destroyed. Houses were destroyed. Terrified residents fled to seek safety. Seventy Christians were killed. Our partners reported that “all through the attacks which lasted for quite some time, there was no security intervention”.
- From February to August 2021, we identified hundreds of reports of armed Fulani herdsmen destroying Christian farmland, with farmers being killed. Certain localities were repeatedly attacked: Kpatenvie, Nche-tahu and Jebbu-Miango. Kpatenvie has been more heavily attacked by the armed Fulani herdsmen than any other locality.
- On 26 November 2021, three children and seven adults were killed by armed Fulani herdsmen when the village of Te'egbe was attacked from around midnight to 2:00am. Three other people were wounded and at least 690 were displaced. All individuals killed were ECWA members.
- On 11 January 2022, suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked Ancha village, killing 18 Christians, six of whom were children. The attack lasted in excess of two hours. Over 24 households with more than 100 residential rooms were razed to the ground. Cars, motorcycles and harvested food crops were also destroyed, and many valuables stolen.
- On 2 April 2022, Chandozerreci was attacked. Three people were killed, one injured, 25 households with fifty rooms were set ablaze, 40 barns and 28 kitchens, 1 grinding machine, 1 motorcycle were burnt. There was unquantifiable damage ranging from theft of domestic animals (goats, chickens etc) to looting of household properties to burning of harvested food crops. The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) building was burnt.

### ***Zangon Kataf LGA, Kaduna state***



- On 8 May 2019, armed Fulani Herdsmen attacked Gora Gan village, killing 27 people, and injuring many others.
- Between 10 and 12 July 2020, at least 22 people were killed, and an unknown number injured and displaced in a series of attacks by suspected armed Fulani herdsmen. The following attacks took place despite a substantial security presence in the area and a 24-hour curfew that had been in place since the murder of a church leader's son on 10 June 2020. On 10 July 2020, nine people were killed and many more were injured during an early morning (1:30 a.m.) attack on the Chibwob community in Gora Ward in the Atyap Chieftdom. Most of the victims were women and children. The assailants also burnt down over 20 homes, several motorcycles, and a car; they destroyed farms; stole 24 cows and other livestock; and looted property and food stocks. On 11 July 2020, armed Fulani herdsmen attacked several settlements close to Chibwob, including the Kigudu community on the boundary between Zangon Kataf and Kauru LGAs. Ten women, one infant and an elderly man were burned to death inside a house in which they had taken refuge. On 12 July 2020, armed Fulani herdsmen launched a morning attack on Ungwan Audu village in the Gora Ward killing one person and looting the entire village before burning it down entirely.
- On 17 December 2020, eight Christians were killed 7 days to Christmas by rampaging gunmen believed to be Fulani herdsmen. The attackers arrived at the village of Gora Gan, at 8:00 p.m. on 17 December and started shooting. The gunmen then opened fire at fleeing villagers.
- On 21 January 2021, suspected herdsmen burned down the building where a Christian conference was to have been held during 29-31 January 2021.
- On 13 July 2021, armed Fulani herdsmen killed thirty-three Christians in Atyap, burnt 8 Churches and 336 houses.
- On 14 July 2021, Matyei was raided. Eight people were killed, and 156 homes were burned down, along with the Catholic church. On the same day, in Abuyab village, 12 homes and the ECWA building was burned down. The herdsmen then destroyed a bridge linking Matyei village with Zangon Kataf town and other Christian communities.
- On 5 November 2021, armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Abuyab village (Abobo). Ten people were killed, and houses were burnt down.
- On 13 January 2022, Kurmin Masara community was raided leaving 11 people killed, over 30 houses burned, and motorcycles and farm products destroyed.
- On 8 February 2022, Zaman Dabo community was raided, leaving one person dead and 64 houses burned down.
- Armed Fulani herdsmen destroyed farmlands of people in Samaru Kataf, Tagama, Ungwan Juju, Ungwan Jaba, Atak-Njei, Mabuhu and many other communities over the period from 26 August to 29 August 2022.
- On 11 March 2023, Ungwan Wakili village, of Atyap Chieftdom, in Zangon Kataf LGA, was attacked by a suspected armed Fulani herdsman. It started at 8:40 p.m. on Saturday 11 March in an apparent reprisal attack resulting from the accidental shooting of a Fulani man by the police at Ungwan Wakili Junction, and the subsequent burning of motorcycles by a mob which followed because of the pandemonium that ensued after the shooting incident.
- On 15 April 2023, during a Fulani herdsmen attack on the Christian village of Runji, 40 houses were burned, and seven persons sustained injuries requiring treatment at the hospital. Some of the victims were said to have been burnt alive as the herdsmen set houses ablaze.

## **A Pattern of Government Impotence and Impunity**

Our respective organizations, our members and our partners have been reporting for years on the Nigerian government's failure to prevent and protect civilians from the increase of brutal acts of violence of which many Nigerians are victims, but most particularly Christians - with impunity. By failing to prevent and failing to protect its citizens from widespread and extreme levels of violence, the Nigerian government is violating the right to life of its citizens.

Andrew Gwaivangmin Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association – interviewed for the purpose of this report – said that the killing and kidnappings raise questions of accountability of the leadership, the lack of political will to address this issue and to pursue investigation of crimes. "We don't need to beg the police to go. We don't need to wait for the senate to call for an investigation in the case of a killed priest," he said.

An Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) communiqué issued on 25 April 2021 signed by ECWA President, Rev. Stephen Baba Panya, and General Secretary, Rev. Yunusa Sabo Nmadu, condemned the "systematic genocide being executed against Christian and other autochthonous communities throughout Nigeria, especially in the Middle Belt. This is typically orchestrated through continuous raid on Christian farming communities with lethal weapons, often in the dead of the night. Thousands of our people have been murdered in cold blood and their lands expropriated by the marauding aggressors. The council notes with utmost disgust the shameful neglect of the plight and deplorable conditions of the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, especially in Middle Belt and other parts of the country."

Our investigations do reveal some effort by Nigerian authorities to stop and prevent violence. Curfews and roadblocks have been imposed in some states; soldiers and policemen have made the ultimate sacrifice in the course of their duties. In 2020, the Federal Government deployed 5,000 Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps' agro-rangers to offer protection to farming investments across the country. In some cases, the prompt intervention of the security agencies helped in repelling the attackers,<sup>v</sup> and prevented fatality figures to be worse.<sup>vi</sup> For instance, on 28 May 2020, a police officer was killed following an attack by Fulani herdsmen on the Christians of Miango community. They were eventually repelled by a combined team of soldiers and policemen, and the lives of over 200 farmers were saved. Moreover, service personnel are certainly engaged in fighting Boko Haram and ISWAP.

However, our research indicates that the Nigerian government's lack of adequate and effective response to Fulani herdsmen violence has not just led to great harm and suffering for the victims but has contributed to a widespread insecurity and an escalation of violence. We have previously argued that the violence in Nigeria is facilitated by the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the country. Studies show that most of the weapons in circulation in Nigeria are in the hands of civilians, and that most arms are held illegally.

Predominantly Christian communities complain of the government's failure to seize Fulani herdsmen's weapons – with the security forces often showing up hours after a Fulani herdsmen attack, leaving predominantly Christian communities defenseless and at the mercy of violent herdsmen, increasing a sense of impunity.<sup>vii</sup> For example, in relation to an armed Fulani herdsmen

attack on 31 July 2021 on Ancha community, Miango District, Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State, the Chairman-elect for Miango Youth Development Association, Mr. Nuhu Nkali, was interviewed in the Nigerian media. Nkali said that the recent attacks could have been averted if the security operatives had responded to their calls. Another example is the following. In December 2022, armed Fulani attacks were launched on Malagum 1 community of Kagoro Chiefdom, Kaura Local Government Council, Southern Kaduna. They took place over three days; at least 46 villagers were killed in two separate attacks across four villages. The Southern Kaduna People's Union blamed local security officials for failing to respond when villagers reported the prospect of danger. *"The villagers had noticed the gathering of Armed Fulani herdsmen coming from different directions on motor bikes to set camp in nearby bush some days back...the security forces deployed there did nothing under this glaring potential threat to security"*.<sup>viii</sup> Fr. Emmanuel Kazah Faweh, vicar general of the Kafanchan Diocese lamented that *"the security architecture of the country seems overstretched,"* and that local security officials did not prevent the terrorist attacks.<sup>ix</sup> *"Security agents do not act on time; they appear after evil has been carried out by men of the underworld"*.<sup>x</sup> For several years, Open Doors International and many other civil society organizations have criticized the government's failure to contain the spread of attacks carried out by Fulani herdsmen mainly in the Middle Belt and armed 'bandits' which have been devastating Christian communities, particularly in the north, and pointed out that while there is "no doubt that Muslims also suffer in the spreading violence, but Christians in certain regions face an existential threat if this trend of attacks continues".<sup>xi</sup>

The cases above are a fraction of the number of reported instances of violence. Furthermore, an attack on a village does not spare the population from further attacks and acts of violence on predominantly Christian communities. These are widespread and systematic attacks on the civilian population. Open Doors International, along with others, reported on patterns of repeated violence on certain areas and villages, resulting in wiping out of entire areas of their native population, their houses, farmland, and places of worship, and resulting in the mass displacement of thousands of individuals.

## **Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria**

- Acknowledge the role that religion plays in its response to the large-scale violence that is taking place in the country;
- Disarm members of violent armed groups including Fulani herdsmen;
- Boost security presence in communities that are vulnerable and issue instructions to the security forces to be proactive and interventionist in their tasks;
- Investigate the perpetrators of violence, hold them accountable to the justice system and break the cycle of violence that is expanding to other areas of the country;
- Ensure the safe return of those displaced by violence to their towns and villages;
- Extend a standing invitation to thematic special procedures who can assist with strengthening national capacity to prevent and protect civilians from the violence.

## Part 2: Blasphemy Laws and the Lynching of Blasphemy Suspects

While article 38 of the Constitution of Nigeria protects the right to freedom of religion or belief, section 204 of Nigeria's Criminal Code Act, under Chapter 19 "Offences Relating to Religious Worship," criminalizes with up to two years of prison "an act which any class of persons consider as a public insult on their religion, with the intention that they should consider the act such an insult."

A greater threat to the right to freedom of religion stems from the crime of blasphemy under sharia (Islamic law) which is applied by Islamic courts in twelve states in the Muslim-majority north. These courts view blasphemy as an offence punishable by death.

On 12 May 2022, Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a second-year Christian college student, was killed by a mob of Muslim students in Sokoto, Nigeria, after being accused of blasphemy.

Sharia, or Islamic law, is applicable in Sokoto. It criminalizes blasphemy. Blasphemy laws incentivize violence against Christians, as well as Muslims and non-religious people who could be accused of blasphemy.

On 9 July 2016, Eunice Elisha, the wife of Pastor Olawale Elisha, was murdered in the early hour by suspected Muslim fanatics. The murder took place while she was preaching around Gbazango and Pipeline area of Kubwa, a satellite town in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Eunice Elisha regularly preached in Abuja. To-date, no one has been formally charged with her killing.

On 2 June 2015, Bridget Agbahime, a kitchen utensil vendor at Kano city's Kofar Wambai Market, in Kano State, was killed by Muslim extremists after being falsely accused of blasphemy by a neighbor. She was assailed by a mob and beaten and clubbed to death. To-date, no one has been formally charged with her murder.

### Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria

- Abolish blasphemy laws in line with the Nigeria's constitution and international human rights law;
- Hold accountable all responsible for the brutal killings of people like Deborah Samuel in Sokoto, Eunice Elisha in Abuja, Bridgette Agbahime in Kano and others.

---

i <https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/content/sharia-implementation-northern-nigeria-after-15-years>.

ii *Ibid*, p. 38

iii <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/6/nigeria-labels-bandit-gangs-terrorists-in-bid-to-stem-violence>

iv

<https://www.unhcr.org/us/countries/nigeria#:~:text=As%20of%20June%202022%2C%20there,other%20parts%20of%20the%20country>.

v As reported by eyewitnesses for the attack on 8 January 2020, Mangu, Plateau state.

vi Attack on 30 May 2021, Ado LGA, Benue state.

vii Amnesty International, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-61; 35-37.

viii <https://www.nigeriacatholicnetwork.com/nigeria-terror-attacks-kill-46-despite-hopes-for-peaceful-christmas/>

---

ix *Ibid.*

x *Ibid.*

xi Most recently in Open Doors International World Watch List 2023, Country Dossier, Nigeria p. 12.