

HART Visit Report

Nigeria

Report on visit from 9th – 16th November 2016



Figure 1 The Christian Institute in Jos



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1. Executive Summary

The situation in Nigeria continues to intensify, with Boko Haram carrying out brutal attacks and communities additionally being forced to deal with the growing issue of armed Fulani militants. Contrary to widespread reports, we found little sign that the killings and destruction, particularly those perpetrated by Boko Haram, are abating.

HART was encouraged to see that work for reconciliation and joint-faith initiatives continue, in income generation, education and health. However we were saddened by the fact that these initiatives still receive little financial support from larger international donors. Our partners continue to demonstrate resilience, unity and compassion in the face of adversity. Our reconciliation centred project partners provide considerable hope in a country so fractured.

There remains the continued problem of a breakdown in the relationship between Fulani nomadic herders and sedentary farmers. The most concerning outcome of this is the Fulani militants who are reigning terror in many of the states in which HART partners operate. We spoke to numerous people, including children, who told of torture, religious persecution and murder. We also narrowly escaped an attack believed to have been targeted at the HART delegation.

We witnessed how areas occupied by Boko Haram have been devastated with the widespread destruction of homes, crops, churches, mosques. Many Internally Displaced People (IDPs) who had to flee from Boko Haram are living in dire conditions in Plateau State and elsewhere. The scale of malnutrition and starvation caused by Boko Haram is likely to be revealed as increasingly worse as more areas are liberated. We spoke with numerous individuals affected by Boko Haram who, in spite of widespread reports of a retreat, are living proof that the organisation is still in a strong position to inflict terror.

Our delegation were left with the impression that the amazing resilience of individuals and communities under constant attack and the creative energy of local leaders in building for reconstruction and reconciliation all could achieve so much more if wider funding was received. It is hoped by HART that international governments and other potential funders will recognize the importance of financially supporting both aid for the IDPs from the devastated areas and also the various small grassroots projects. These projects are working in a thoroughly practical and community embedded way to foster reconciliation and should receive more support to do so.

2. Recommendations

2.1 To the Nigeria Government

- The government must continue its sustained action against Boko Haram and extend it to militant groups such as the armed Fulani herdsman militants in order to tackle the vast number of killings and human rights abuses within the region.
- The government must take action to pinpoint the sources where herdsman are acquiring their weapons from and cut off these sources; also who is behind the funding of the widely alleged larger herds.
- Regarding forced land grabbing, the government must ensure strict land ownership laws are in practice and land can be protected instead of being forcefully taken by the Fulani.
- Amidst all the concern for Fulani-farmer conflict, the genuine interests of the nomadic Fulani need to be allowed.
- Mere displacement of Boko Haram does not resolve the problem; the government must ensure serious repercussions in the cases of human rights violations.
- The government must do more to ensure accountability.

- Support to the returning IDPs is urgently required. The most urgent needs are shelter, food, support in restoring water sources and mine clearance.
- Education, open to all without explicit or hidden discrimination, needs to be prioritised in northern states, increased resources are needed to ensure this.
- The routes and reserves designated by Nigerian law for Fulani Herdsmen should be examined and reopened, as far as is possible in the very different conditions now prevailing, to settle land-use disputes.
- More needs to be done in the north and middle belt of Nigeria to ensure that all ethnic groups are represented in government and authority.
- The government must ensure that there is accountability by providing an accessible justice system in place where people even with minimal resources or education can refer to for justice.

2.2 To Civil Society Groups in Nigeria

- Disputes within all communities must be resolved by negotiation instead of resorting to violence.
- Those engaging in reconciliation projects must be encouraged, with their work being reinforced, strengthened and funded as much as possible.
- HART strongly encourages further recording and documentation of the ongoing human rights abuses in the region.
- We strongly encourage Churches in the South of Nigeria to take a more active role in supporting persecuted Christian communities in the north and middle belt of Nigeria.

2.3 To the International Community

- HART strongly encourages further scrutiny and fact finding on behalf of NGOs in the middle belt and northern states of Nigeria, where severe human rights abuses continue to occur.
- There is an immediate need to provide aid, shelter and support to the 1.9 million people who have been displaced by the insurgency.¹ And to ensure firm monitoring of the aid reaching the targeted recipients.
- The International Community must continue to condemn the actions of Boko Haram, but equally come out in condemnation of the Fulani militants perpetrating severe human rights abuses in the region.
- The International Community needs to assist the Federal and State authorities within Nigeria in the realistic examination of the future of 'nomad – sedentary farmer' relationships, sharing experience from other countries of the same traditional conflict and how it was resolved.

2.4 To the British Government

- HART strongly encourages the British government to take a more hardline approach in condemning any forms of religious persecution that are present in Nigeria.
- We also urge the British government to recognise the severe and worsening situation of the armed Fulani militants.

¹ International Organization for Migration, 30 September, 2016, available: <http://nigeria.iom.int/sites/default/files/newsletter/IOM%20Nigeria%20Situation%20Report%20-16%20-%2030%20September%202016.pdf>

- Additionally the British government should do more to provide aid, shelter and support to the 1.9 million displaced in Nigeria.

3. About HART

The Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust works with fourteen local partners across eight countries in the spheres of education, environment, health, human rights, women’s empowerment and more. We strongly feel that local people are best placed to identify, understand and fulfil their own needs, and to create a sustainability embedded within the circumstances of their own communities. Therefore, all of our projects are locally led from vision through to implementation, by our inspirational and highly proficient local partners. On top of this, as our work is primarily in locations of which there is little awareness, we believe that advocacy must go hand in hand with aid. For this reason we engage regularly with the British Parliament, in campaigning and awareness raising. HART has worked in Nigeria for over a decade, since 2004. We are proud to be affiliated with the local partners of The Christian Institute and Mai Akido Reconciliation Project in Jos, an Schools and Clinic in Bari, Kano and in Bauchi.

3.1 Methodology

HART works with local partners in every aspect of our work. It is important to note that the research for this report was conducted primarily with these partners (who all identify as Christian in faith) and we were not able to interview a truly representative cross-section of the population of all Northern Nigeria in the time available. This is a report of our visit in November 2016 and is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of this complex conflict.

4. Itinerary and Purposes

November 2016

10th – Arrival in Abuja from Heathrow. Subsequent travel to Jos; with GhADS, travel to village;

11th – Visit to Institute; meet with Archbishop; visit Zambiri School; on return, meet with women and young men from Mai Akido Reconciliation Project, and local Muslim leader

12th – Visit to IDP Camp and interview individuals; visit village of Jong

13th – Sunday Church Services; afternoon meeting with Hassan John; evening meal at Archbishop's home

14th – Visit to Diocesan offices; travel to Bauchi to meet Bishop Musa and visit School; meet team from Network4Africa

15th – Travel to Abuja; meeting with various people regarding troubles and violence.

16th - Return from Abuja to Heathrow.

HART visited Nigeria from the 9th to 16th of November. The HART delegation included HART CEO Corinna Loges, HART founder & President Caroline Cox, HART Chairperson Helen Gilbert and Projects & Logistics coordinator David Thomas. The delegation arrived in Abuja on Thursday 10th November and travelled to Jos, Plateau State on the same day. We visited our partners in and around Jos as well as Bauchi. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit our local partners in Kano State because of their absence at a provincial meeting. We visited the Tabitha Evangel Ministry IDP Camp in Western Jos and visited the Fulani surrounded village of Jong.

The purposes for the visit were:

1. To obtain up-to-date information on the current human rights and humanitarian situation in Nigeria.
2. To discuss advocacy needs and strategy with civil society representatives.
3. To ascertain the current needs and further plans of aid with our local partners.

5. Context

The Fulani Herdsmen

The semi-nomadic group predominantly dwell in northern areas and the middle belt of Nigeria. The rural Fulani remain significantly under-represented in state-level politics, in spite of the fact that the urban Fulani are strongly represented. The movement of these people is growingly restricted, and tensions arise over their cattle damaging cultivated land by roaming over it. Many of the Fulani in Plateau state are members of Izala, a fundamentalist Sunni Islamic movement. The group is often in conflict with the Christian community. There are claims both that they are dismissed by Boko Haram as infidels and that they cooperate with and are used by Boko Haram. There were violent riots in both 2001 and 2010 between Muslims and Christians in Jos.

Elsewhere in Nigeria this year, in February Fulani herders and farmers massacred 300 people in central Benue state and 40 were killed in Enugu state in April.² Disagreements over the use of essential resources such as farmland, grazing areas and water between herders and local farmers continue to be the major source of the fighting.³ There is much mistrust between the Muslim Fulani herders and mostly Christian farming communities. There are allegations but little hard evidence that these attacks are coordinated or that the Fulani groups have any singular political goal. As the Fulani are not a single militant group this creates difficulty in dealing with the crisis. According to Mercy Corps the conflict has cost Nigeria more than \$14bn in the three years up until 2015.⁴ It is also important to distinguish between the rural and urban Fulani. When considering this distinction the severe under representation of the rural Fulani in politics becomes clearer. For example the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari is an urban Fulani who is not considered to directly represent the interests of the rural Fulani in spite of descending from the same ethnic group.

In July 2016 it was reported that more than 80 people were thought to have been killed in Benue State by the Fulani herdsmen, with #Benuemassacre soon trending on twitter.⁵ It is widely argued that land scarcity rather than religious conflict is at the heart of the conflict with the Fulani. However, the situation is recognised to be worsening, from both natural and human-driven causes. These encompass issues of larger herds; the advance of the Sahara causing herds to be grazed further south; increased requirements for pasturage and watering, due to climate change; and finally a natural increase in population of sedentary farmers. All these are likely to create a growing demand on land and an increasing difficulty to see simply the opening of old Fulani routes as the sole solution to the problem.

² BBC, 5th May 2016, available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36139388>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mercy Corps, July 2015, available: <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Mercy%20Corps%20Nigeria%20Policy%20Memo%20Economic%20Costs%20of%20Middle%20Belt%20Conflict.pdf>

⁵ The Guardian, 12th July 2016, available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/12/the-next-boko-haram-nigerian-attacks-raise-fears-of-new-terror-threat>

Christianity in northern Nigeria

Nigeria accounted for more than half the 7,000 worldwide killings of Christians in 2015.⁶ In our last visit HART spoke with Christian individuals living in the north who stated they had changed their last names to Muslim ones because of the discriminatory practise toward Christians in terms of employment and services. In the north of Nigeria, Christians also remain largely under-represented politically at the state level, although the same can be said for the rural Shiite Fulani Muslims. Churches are additionally often the targets of Boko Haram. As mentioned in last year's visit report, although Boko Haram has been known to target Christians, the number of Muslims killed by the terrorist group has now over taken the amount of Christians killed by them.

With regards to the Fulani, it was reported in Christian press news outlets that more than 65 churches had been looted by Fulani attacks in Benue state in last June and July.⁷ In Plateau State the Berom tribe has been locked in conflict with the Fulani since the turn of the century. Our local partners have expressed severely growing concerns that the Fulani conflict is becoming increasingly sectarian by nature. This of course challenges the widely held notion that the conflict is based around worsening land issues.

Boko Haram

The insurgency continues to rage on, despite the Nigerian Government's claims of vast territorial successes against the militia group. As noted in last year's visit report, it is the horrors and devastation that are left behind when territory is recaptured that is helping the international community to paint a better picture of what life is like under Boko Haram in the isolated areas . More than 3 million have been displaced and isolated by the group. Many are living in makeshift camps and an additional 2 million people are still inaccessible because of Boko Haram fighters' control.⁸ The scale of the resulting famine is proving to be far greater than expected as the level of the crisis has been both underestimated in the past and remains largely hidden from the international community. Aid to those affected has also been severely hindered by the increased security risks. UNICEF states there are 244,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition in Borno and that an additional 49,000 children will die if they don't receive treatment.⁹ These figures are likely to prove a serious underestimation as more is gradually uncovered in regards to the atrocities in the long hidden recesses of this otherwise well-publicised conflict.

21 of the Chibok girls were released by Boko Haram last October; the release was aided by the involvement of the International Committee of the Red Cross who provided assistance during the transfer of the girls.¹⁰ The releases came after years of ongoing negotiations between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, although there are conflicting reports over what the terrorist group received in return. The girls who have been released have been left traumatised and distressed after 30 months in captivity, and little is known about the remaining 200 who still remain in Boko Haram

⁶ The Guardian, 14th January 2016, available:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/14/nigeria-christian-boko-haram-terror>

⁷ Christian Today, 20th July 2016, available:

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/murder.and.ethnic.cleansing.in.nigeria.as.muslim.fulani.herdsmen.go.after.christian.farmers/91064.htm>

⁸ Philly.com, 17th October 2016, available:

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation_world/20161016_In_Nigeria_silent_starvation_for_survivors_of_Boko_Haram.html

⁹ Amnesty, 18th October 2016, available: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/10/nigerias-forgotten-children/>

¹⁰ BBC, 15th October 2016, available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-37667915>

captivity.¹¹ There have additionally been worrying reports that a third of the Chibok girls still held by Boko Haram are unwilling to leave their captors, either because of radicalisation or feelings of social shame as they were forced to marry extremists and have children.¹²

UNICEF has estimated that 75,000 children will die in the coming year if donors do not act quickly to address the growing famine.¹³ Severe malnutrition has been found in as much as 20-50 per cent of children in pockets around the affected region. UNICEF has doubled the amount of its appeal for Nigeria to \$115 million, with only \$24 million being raised so far.

6. Project Partners

Bari

On this visit it was not possible to visit the project of the hospital and school in Bari, due to the absence of the Bishop out-of-country. However, we have continued to receive updates on the hospital and school throughout the past year.

Kano

We have no project in Kano at the present time, but do seek to maintain a relationship with our partner there, the Bishop of Kano, due to the difficult and dangerous circumstances in which he and his people live. We were unable to visit for the same reason as the Bishop of Bari..

Bauchi

In 2015 HART donated towards the school in Tefa Balewa, a seriously neglected area.

This year HART was taken to the village of Ningi, and the school, the Ningi Academy Primary and Secondary School. The community is both Muslim and Christian and experienced attacks in 2013. This school is attended by all from the community, with teachers and governors both Muslim and Christian. The majority of the pupils are Muslim.

“People say Muslim and Christian cannot live together. We show they are wrong.”

“I want to see the day when my child and the child of the Iman go to school together.”

The school started about 16 years ago, by the local Anglican pastor. It reached a maximum of over 300 pupils. Unfortunately, after the troubles following the national elections, many of the local people re-located to the east of the country. Now, there are over 250 pupils with 18 teachers assisted by 4 COR members, carrying out youth service.

The staff and governors felt that their greatest need was for a bore-hole and a perimeter wall, due to the vulnerability of attending children. We were told the story of one female pupil who was attacked in the

¹¹ Amnesty, 18th October 2016, available: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/10/nigerias-forgotten-children/>

¹² The Guardian, 18th October 2016, available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/18/third-of-students-abducted-by-boko-haram-unwilling-to-leave-captors>

¹³ The Independent, 29th September 2016, available: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-conflict-unicef-malnutrition-farming-un-appeal-msf-oxfam-a7337836.html>

grounds from outside. Following these needs, are various pieces of equipment, including computers, and the building of an examination hall and new class block.

HART left funds for the drilling of the bore-hole, and was notified by the 30th November that it had been dug and was already producing “pure water”.

Jos

Christian Institute

HART continues to supply a small amount of funds to the Institute, on the edge of Jos, where over 100 students are in training: mainly 35 health workers and 60 pastors. Other disciplines are IT and music. The institute was founded by Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi nearly 20 years ago and deaconess Susan Essam has continued to be the director. Amongst the various identifiable needs: a small one is for more, up-to-date, books (and visual aids) on health and physiology for the teaching of the health workers; the librarian and lecturers is to identify and communicate to HART a list of such, appropriate to their curriculum.

The Mai Adiko Peace Project in Rayfield, Jos

This project has grown over the past three years to work for reconciliation amongst Muslims, Christians and others in the Rayfield area of Jos. Started by Archbishop Ben Kwashi and Canon Hassan John, it has from the beginning functioned with the support of the local Muslim leaders. Its vision is to create a culture of people from different communities coming together to work and to be friends. The women of the communities clearly have a very important role in this. Nearly 40 women are at present attending, on income generation courses in dressmaking, bakery and jewellery manufacture; and are having considerable success in economic terms as well as in reconciliation.

The intention had always been to include youth, especially young men who, when unemployed, dissatisfied or into drugs/alcohol, can be a good recruiting ground for violent groups. Plans for this work have been held up. However, on this visit, we saw two good signs of forward movement: firstly, two basketball pitches are now being developed (funded by HART); secondly, the members of HART participated in a meeting of 30 young men who have come together as the first group of these youth, many of them with troubled backgrounds. Income generation as well as sports are to be developed amongst them. And, like the women, they come from varying ethnic, religious, communities.

Zambiri School

HART was also able to visit the Zambiri school, as we did last year. It is attended by approximately 400 pupils, on the edge of Jos, and founded and organized by the energetic and loving Gloria Kwashi, the Archbishop's wife. Education is only one of the services of this school: a substantial and balanced meal is offered every day; also Gloria Kwashi and her staff exercise an active and important community role in reaching out to the families of the children, and identifying children at risk who could benefit from the school's education and protection.

7. The Fulani conflict

The HART delegation was deeply concerned but what appears to be a worsening situation in Plateau State and the middle belt of Nigeria with regards to violence perpetrated by Fulani militants. We spoke with and gathered testimonies from those affected by the conflict.

7.1 Testimonies from the Tabitha Evangel Ministry (TEM) IDP Camp, Western Jos Plateau State

The TEM camp was originally established to be a safe haven for Muslims who had converted to Christianity. More recently it has become a place of refuge for children who have been displaced in a swathe of attacks. We spoke with numerous children affected by conflict with Fulani militants. A recurring pattern of unaggravated attacks, murder and violent assaults emerged, with many of those attacked bearing scars. The camp is home to 165 children and 30 adults and provides shelter for orphans and the homeless.



Figure 2 Goodness, David and Abednigo

We spoke to siblings Goodness (aged 9), David (aged 6) and Abednigo (aged 14) about an attack by Fulani militants which they survived. They had visible scars from wounds inflicted with a machete.

'The Fulani came to our village at night. The dogs were barking. There were torches on our house. Our mother and father were outside. They shot our father in the legs. They shot him again in the head. Our mother was screaming, 'He is dead! He is dead!' She ran to another house with our little brother. The Fulani came into our room and started cutting us. They shot David in the tummy and he fell down. They thought we were dead. Neighbours found us and took us to the hospital. Our mother was safe. She brought us here.'



Figure 3 Richard

Richard (aged 15) discussed an attack in which his father lost his life and his family was subsequently separated from one another.

'It was 2011. I can't remember the month. Our family was eating one night, my father, my mother and three children. My father went outside to use the toilet and he didn't come back. He was attacked by Fulani. They cut off his hand. He was killed. My mother brought me here, and my brother. She lives in a village here with our youngest brother.'

Juliet (aged 15) spoke to us about how the Fulani came and burned her village of 1000 inhabitants, forcing her to flee from her home.

'My mother was sick but my father didn't have enough money to repair his car and take her to hospital. He eventually went east to get help, but on his way back, the car caught fire and he died. With my mother still very sick, the Fulani herdsmen came. They killed four people and burned the whole village (called Supp, in Plateau State under Riyom). I ran away and moved in with my auntie. There were 1000 people in the village. No one lives there now. People are too scared to return. They are scared of the Fulani people.'

These shocking testimonies illustrate the brutality that children in Nigeria are being exposed to as a result of the ongoing conflicts with the Fulani. They also give us a vital glimpse into a conflict going widely unreported, where children are being attacked and made orphans.

7.2 Visit to Jong village in Ropp District, Plateau State

We visited Jong village in the Ropp district, one of the four farming villages attacked by Fulani militants in May 2015. The area is now surrounded by Fulani herdsmen and protected by two military personnel. After departing the village we learned that Jong was ambushed in an attack believed to be targeted at our delegation.

We spoke with a local pastor who discussed the events of the attack in May 2015.

'They were trained terrorists with guns. They killed those who couldn't run – the aged, the children and the blind.'

Another local pastor we spoke with additionally discussed the horrors of the attack in May 2015, emphasising the brutality.

'People were just sitting and the enemies came. They started cutting them.'

We were shocked and saddened that conditions for people in these Fulani militant surrounded areas had failed to improve since our last visit. There is a very clear and real need for an address of these areas

8. The Boko Haram Insurgency

The suffering caused by Fulani militants is not the only problem affecting children, women and adults in the Plateau State. Although violence caused by the Boko Haram has seemingly reduced, they continue to raid homes and cause destruction in several regions such as the Borno State. On our visit, we not only heard stories of mass destruction but also brutality and violence towards dependents such as elderly or children.

8.1 Testimonies from the Tabitha Evangel Ministry (TEM) IDP Camp, Western Jos Plateau State

On our visit to the TEM IDP camp we additionally heard testimonies from those who had been displaced by Boko Haram. There was a continued trend in the violent brutality experienced by those that had come into contact with the group.

A ten year old Christiana describes how she and her siblings escaped the attack by Boko Haram.

"My father died in an accident and my mother died giving birth to my younger brother so we went to my grandmother's house in Wuba, Borno State – the only Christian home in the village. Boko Haram attacked our house and demanded to see dad. We explained he was dead so they asked: 'Who is taking care of you?' My older brother then called my grandfather to come. They shot my grandfather in the stomach and he didn't die. Then they shot him in the head and he died. They broke down the door and entered, ransacked the house and left."

We spoke to Bebra (aged 12) who recalls to have faced the horrors of Boko Haram in the middle of the night.

"We were sleeping when the Boko Haram came. They surrounded my house and smashed the door. My brother pleaded with them: 'If it is money you want, I will give it to you'. But they forced him to lie down and insisted on seeing my father/. I watched as they shot my6 father and brother and sliced the back of their necks...I don't think anyone lives in my village now."

Rachel (aged 15) told us about how houses and churches in Biu were burned by the Boko Haram.

"My parents died when I was small. My brother, Abdul, was sick and taken to Lagos to live with my grandmother, while I stayed in Biu. When Boko Haram entered our state, they tried to fix bombs to people but they were intercepted. Then they came to burn our houses and churches. They tried to burn my church but it only burned the carpet. I saw them take off people's heads and place them on their back. We ran and hid in the soldiers' barracks. My auntie was killed."

These testimonies give an important insight into the far reaching devastation that Boko Haram has inflicted upon Nigeria. The fact that most of these stories come from children only makes them even more concerning. Additionally the TEM camp is a prime example of the large IDP population the group has created.

9. Christianity in Nigeria

HART primarily works with Christian faith based partners in Nigeria and on this visit worrying concerns were raised at the state of religious freedom in the country. In the TEM camp and the village of Jong we heard worrying stories of people being displaced and attacked by Fulani militants and Boko Haram.

9.1 Testimony from the Tabitha Evangel Ministry (TEM) IDP Camp, Western Jos Plateau State

On our visit to the TEM IDP Camp we heard of numerous instances of individuals facing persecution because of their religious beliefs, with some even clearly being targeted because of this.



Figure 4 Zacharia

We spoke with a 20 year old man called Zacheria who stated he had been disowned because of his faith.

My family is Muslim. At Primary School I had a New Testament. I hid it at home. I read John 14:6 – I am the way, the truth and the life.... I meditated on this. I saw the difference between Muhammed and Jesus. In secondary school I decided to repent and follow Jesus. I sold my phone and bought a bus ticket to Bauchi. I went to a Catholic Church. I was stopped and my bag checked. I told the man my story and he took me to another church. I accepted Christ and stayed with someone there. But I wanted to go to school so he brought me here (the camp) to learn more about Christ and I started school here. I called my parents but my father disowned me. I have not seen them again. I want to be a lawyer.

Bebra (aged 12) also recalled, *“We were sleeping when the Boko Haram came...They also went to the pastor’s house, shooting his wife in the leg and his daughter in the hand. They shot the pastor and cut off his head.”*

These testimonies raise serious concerns for the welfare of Christians in Nigeria and also demonstrate how Christian figures can become targets because of their symbolic positions in the faith.

9.2 Visit to Jong village in Ropp District, Plateau State

In the village of Jong we also heard from a local pastor how religious figures had been targeted by Fulani militants.

One of the local pastor we spoke with also stated: *'A pastor was the first casualty. They surrounded him. They killed him and then they rejoiced, shouting 'Allahu Akhbar' and 'we have got a hero.'*

HART strongly feels that there is significant evidence to suggest that Christian individuals and figures are being targeted on the basis of their faith. These testimonies raise worrying concerns about freedom of religion in Nigeria and certainly merit further investigation.

10. Conclusions

The continued attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram and the growing issue of armed Fulani herdesmen leave little room for optimism with regards to the situation in northern Nigeria. All of our collected testimonies demonstrate that the raging conflicts and instability in Nigeria are in need both of more attention as well as greater aid from the international community. It is dangerous to make the assumptions that Boko Haram are in retreat and the Fulani herdesmen are a small issue.

As our collected testimonies demonstrate, Fulani militants continue to wreak terror over the central belt of Nigeria. This is a much overlooked issue of the Nigerian government and international community and more must be done to subvert these activities. Although the Fulani militants are currently a none centralised entity this may not always be the case and such a scenario must be prevented from ever materialising.

Our visit also showed us that the Boko Haram insurgency is a long way from being over. The testimonies we gathered regarding those affected by Boko Haram illustrate the long term damage caused. More must be done to ensure the safety and rehabilitation of those who have had their lives destroyed by the terrorist group. As more and more areas become liberated it becomes ever more clear more must be done to reach those still in Boko Haram held areas. The risk of widespread famine cannot be ignored and must be addressed.

Additionally it is the responsibility of the Nigerian government, civil society and the international community to ensure that no one in Nigeria is persecuted and targeted on the grounds of their faith. We heard of both Boko Haram and Fulani militants targeting individuals on the grounds of this and strongly encourage all actors to uphold the principal of freedom of religion.

Although there is much cause for concern in Nigeria, HART remains more encouraged than ever by our remarkable project partners who continue to foster reconciliation and peace in these turbulent times.