

HIDDEN ATROCITIES

The escalating persecution and displacement of
Christians in northern and central Nigeria



The ruins of Trinity Church in Jos, Plateau State

A visit report by Baroness Cox and Revd David Thomas



Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust
November 2018

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Deaconess Susan Essam, Jos

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Margaret, Ngar village

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Chundung, Kurra

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Church Warden at St Timothy Church in Jos

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Lydia, Ningon village

“I called my brother but there was no reply. The next morning I found out that he, his wife and four others were shot, butchered and burnt.”

Helen, Gana-Ropp

“They were going from house to house, looting and taking away anything they found valuable and then setting the houses on fire.”

Helen, Ex-Land village

“We are not safe in our homes. I am raising an alarm – if the government will listen. Lord in your mercy.”

Archbishop Ben Kwashi, Jos

Summary of meetings

During our visit, we were privileged to meet:

- The Most Revd Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi, Anglican Diocese of Jos
- The Rt Revd Musa M. Tula, the Anglican Bishop of Bauchi
- The Rt Revd Zacchaeus the Anglican Bishop of Kano
- Bala Mohamed Adam, New Hausa Community leader in Rayfield
- The Revd Canon Hassan John
- The Director of Anguldi Camp and a number of Internally Displaced People
- We also had a telephone conversation with the Rt Revd the Anglican Bishop of Bari in Kano State

Contents

This report consists of summaries of concerns raised during these meetings, including:

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Background

Strategic land grabbing and the permanent displacement of Christian communities

Ethnic and religious animosity has fuelled conflicts in Nigeria for decades. The existence of northern radical Islamist sects, for example, has been a source of considerable tension since the country gained independence in 1960. The recent reign of terror inflicted by Boko Haram has been well documented. Less well known, however, is the escalation of attacks by Fulani herders against predominantly Christian communities in the middle belt region.

The Anglican Bishop of Bauchi, Musa Mwin Tula, represents many of the worst affected areas. He told us: *“The conflict between herdsman and farmers has existed for a long time. But the menace in recent times has jumped from a worrisome itch in the north to a cancerous disease, spreading throughout the country, claiming lives and threatening to spiral into a monster.”*

Who are the Fulani?

The Fulani are an ethnic group of about 20 million people across 20 west and central African countries. Since time immemorial, they have driven their herds of cattle through other people’s lands, causing tensions and some violence, but traditionally, they have moved on. However in the last two to three years, increasing numbers of Fulani have adopted a new ‘land grabbing’ policy in northern and central Nigeria. They attack rural villages, kill local people, destroy homes, drive villagers off their lands and settle in their place. While there have been attacks by Fulani herders on Muslim farmers in Zamfara State, these are overwhelmingly outnumbered by attacks on Christians.

The Global Terrorism Index in 2016 and 2017 named Fulani militants as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world, with only Boko Haram, ISIS and al-Shabab being accounted deadlier.

As recently as 1 October, four people including a soldier were killed by Fulani herders in Nkiendoro village, Plateau State. As with other similar attacks, the village was remote and vulnerable. Herders used sophisticated weaponry, forcing families to flee their homes and farmland. Two churches were burned, 17 water pumps were demolished, and 47 farms were cut and destroyed.

What is the Fulani 'land grabbing' strategy?

Attacks on farming communities tend to follow a similar pattern. The Fulani will use young cattle herders to scout a village. These children will speak to local people, ascertaining whether villagers are armed and where any weapons are kept. The Fulani will send a 'warning signal' to the village 1-2 weeks before the attack. But as the message is delivered to an individual, or is brought via a child, the Army often refuse to respond. The insurgency begins with about 50-100 Fulani herders shooting outside the village. They shout "Allahu Akbar" and attack homes of pastors, community heads and local vigilantes – having previously ascertained information from the young cattle herders. In one attack last year, three villages received a 'warning signal' and were attacked. Many fled but the Army put those who could not flee into a classroom; then the Army fled. The classroom was attacked and 29 out of 30 villagers were killed.

The scale of suffering

Thousands of civilians have died in communal attacks led by Fulani militia.

- Human rights group Christian Solidarity Worldwide report that, in the first quarter of 2018, the Fulani perpetrated at least 106 attacks in central Nigeria. The death toll for these four months, purely from Fulani militia violence, was 1,061.
- The Christian Association of Nigeria estimate that between January and June this year, around 6,000 people have been killed by Fulani.
- In Nasarawa State alone, in the first six months of 2018, 314 villages were attacked, 404 people were killed, over 24,000 homes and 539 churches destroyed, and over 242,000 persons were displaced. In Plateau State, between mid-2015 and mid-2018, 54 communities were destroyed and another 123 came under sustained attack. The number of deaths in Plateau State in 2018 are estimated at 2,000.
- On 4 July, the Nigerian House of Representatives declared killings in Plateau State to be a genocide.

Survivor testimonies

Our small NGO, the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART), works with local partners in Nigeria. We are privileged to support the Christian Institute and Mai Akido Reconciliation Project in Jos, and Schools and Clinic in Bari, Kano and in Bauchi. We visited our partners to receive reports of projects receiving funding from HART. We also obtained information on recent developments in areas of northern and central belt states.

While it was only possible to meet a very limited number of people and therefore obtain limited evidence, the consistency of the information and the experiences of those whom we met is inherently disturbing.

Recent attacks

Sarah, from Jos [testimony recorded by Deaconess Susan Essam]

On the outskirts of the city, under the foothills, are two houses close together, where Sarah (not her real name), her husband and children, her mother, uncle and other family members lived. The Fulani had for a long time been coming around that area to graze their cattle and it was alleged that a Fulani boy was killed around there, but no evidence of that has been seen. On the late evening of Thursday 27 September, they came and killed nine people in one house and three in the other, including a pregnant woman. They shot Sarah's husband and children and so she begged them to kill her too, but they refused, saying that they wanted her to cry and bear the pain.

Margaret, from Ngar village

"We were in our village when we got phone calls of the attack going on in Ex-Land, a village not too far from Ngar. We saw the smoke rising from the distance as the village was being burnt. There was panic everywhere. At about 2pm the Fulani attackers reached our village. They came in numbers. There were gunshots, then we heard the shouts of 'Allahu Akbar!' And then lots of gunfire. Many ran to the bushes and were killed, while those that thought they could hide in their rooms were burnt alive. We lived with other Muslims in the village. The attack was on the Christian section of the village. No Muslim or their houses were attacked. Many Christians then ran to homes of Hausa Muslims for safety and protection yet the Fulani Islamists went after them to the houses of the Hausa Muslims where they hid and demanded that the Muslims must bring out the Christians to be

killed. Those that were sent out were killed. Many others ran to a mosque to hide. Looting and killings were going on but the Imam, Abdullahi Adamu, took many Christians into the mosque for safety. The Fulani came and demanded that the Imam release the Christians to be killed. The Imam said he would not. A long argument ensued and the Imam said he had lived with the Christians and within their community for over 35 years, with their parents and now the children, and had never had a quarrel or issues with the Christians. He said he would not therefore betray them now and insisted they would have to kill him first before getting into the mosque. He said he will have no blood shed in his mosque. I called my sister's cellphone, Naomi is her name, she lived in the village not too far from me and we had been communicating during the attack, but this time a Fulani answered the phone. We later saw that she was raped and her wrists cut off before she was shot through the heart. They took my brother, his wife and all their six children, tied and slaughtered them like animals. 18 people were killed in the house that day, the rest were all burnt alive. A Muslim saved my life and my four children. I took refuge in their house."

Church Warden at St Timothy Church, Jos

"They came around 7pm and left just before midnight. More than 200 of them in black cloth – well armed. Yesterday we lost another 19 of our people. We are not safe."



St Timothy Church in Jos, Plateau State

Trinity Church, Jos

Trinity Church had suffered a previous attack, which left it largely in ruins. It was attacked again on 1 October. The militants took or destroyed all the music equipment, which included ten speakers, a 12-channel audio mixer, a petrol power generator, a keyboard, as well as the alter table and 85 chairs. Two Security staff escaped through a door at the back of the compound. Before the escalation of attacks, Trinity Church had a congregation of 700-800. Today, there are only 20 worshippers.



After Trinity Church was destroyed by Fulani herders, the congregation moved to a tent, which was also destroyed.

Lydia, from Ningon village, Gashing District

“They capture cows and surround our villages. They use pick-ups, guns and loot and burn our homes. Before the attack, the Fulani told us: ‘There’s no point in sowing because we won’t have a harvest to reap’. They were hacking and killing people, making sure that those that were shot were finished off. They wore black and red – red to conceal blood splashes on their clothes as they butchered their victims. Soldiers, possibly Fulani in military uniforms, shot and

killed anyone who resisted. We were surrounded so some people climbed trees and managed to escape after the attack. My husband was killed in the attack by Fulani.”

Chundung, from Kurra, Burom

“We were at a funeral on a Saturday morning when, outside the church, we heard gunshots. 18 people were killed and their bodies were set alight. The attack continued until 5pm. Fulani wore black. They burnt homes. An old man who couldn’t run was killed. Some women and children gathered their possessions and hid in bushes. But we left with nothing. I had to run 20 miles to a military camp, where I was put into truck to Kurra before being moved to Barkin Ladi. Then Kurra was attacked and five were killed.”

Helen, from Ex-land village

“Around 10am I heard gunshots and people started fleeing to bushes. We received a phone call saying a woman was killed, so we collected her body. She had been shot in the head. When she was killed someone saw a boy in white clothing who was taken to police station. While he was being interrogated, the Fulani came and demanded his release. They mobbed an outpost and returned wearing black and red. I went with five others to hide in a room. I lay flat on the floor and prayed with my children as houses were torched. They were carrying petrol bombs. They were in vehicles. They were going from house to house, looting and taking away anything they found valuable and then setting the houses on fire thereafter. After the attack, at 5pm, I phoned my husband but he didn’t answer. He was killed and left on a road to decompose. My children had taken refuge in a Muslim home. Those who survived were those who went to Muslim homes and told to be quiet. But on Sunday, we heard a message that if Muslims continued to provide shelter, they would be killed. A red Cross vehicle was attacked and worker shot in the foot. 37 were killed in total.”

Kaneng, from Kakuruk

“It was 23 June and I was on my way to a burial. But I was told the road was not safe. Someone had been killed on the way to the funeral. We saw smoke from the village and noticed that the Fulani were preparing for an attack. So we hid for three days until the military took them away. 10 people were killed.”

Helen, from Gana-Ropp

“The attack began at 5pm on 23 June. I called my brother but there was no reply. The next morning I found out that my brother, his wife and four others were shot, butchered and burnt. On 30 June, my home and the hospital was burnt. Six people were killed in a clinic in Mararaban Kantoma. In Gana-Ropp, 9 were killed and 69 houses destroyed.”

Meeting with IDPs

There are almost two million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. The vast majority have been displaced by the insurgencies of Boko Haram and Fulani militia. While the exact numbers are unknown, according to the Plateau State Emergency Management Agency, 38,051 IDPs had taken refuge in 31 camps in the state following recent violence (figure from July 2018).

We visited Anguldi refugee camp in Jos, Plateau State, which provides shelter to 2,600 IDPs, and spoke to a number of survivors. Extracts of their testimonies are recorded below.



1,000 children and 800 women sleep in this room at Anguldi IDP Camp

“On the day of the attack in Gashish district, on 23 June, a Fulani youth killed a woman. When he was arrested and taken to a police outpost, the Fulani challenged the arrest. A phone call from Abuja led to the boy’s release. Later in the day, the Fulani attacked 14 villages, killing many people.”



Hearing testimonies at Anguldi IDP Camp

“The attack started at Ex-land. Simultaneously other villages were attacked, starting with shooting from afar. There were communications between those attacking different villages. The Fulani were running. The Fulani were in front, with soldiers behind. They looted homes then burn them. 14 villages were attacked.”

“Soldiers were directed to loot houses. In all the villages attacked, the military were directed to remove any weapons so people were left defenceless. In all these crises, not one Fulani was killed.”

Nigerian Government response

We heard numerous reports that Fulani attacks are taking place with the Nigerian Government's connivance.

We were told that the Army is aware of the location of Fulani training camps in the hills around Kurra Falls up to Riyom Local Councils, but has failed to take sufficient action. The army has ordered the confiscation of weapons from local farming communities, which residents deem necessary for self-defence against attacks, yet there is no equivalent record of disarmament of Fulani bases. Soon after the confiscation of weapons, the Fulani attack.

The Christian Association of Nigeria report that all military chiefs are supporters of Muhammadu Buhari, the President of Nigeria. They are concerned that the military support the Fulani, who are armed by the Miyetti Allah cattle breeders association. The President is Patron, and it comprises retired military officers, Fulani and non-Fulani Muslims.

In Anguldi IDP camp we were told: *"In more than ten years of crisis in Jos, local people observed a connivance of militants with the military on many occasions. For example, the Government sent in a helicopter with military and Fulani met them. The soldiers were distributed to Fulani homes. The Fulani herdsmen go about with AK47s and soldiers can't challenge them."*

Earlier this year, Nigeria's former army chief of staff and Defence Minister, Lieutenant General Theophilus Y Danjuma, said the armed forces were *"not neutral; they collude"* in the *"ethnic cleansing in...riverine states"* by Fulani militia. He insisted that villagers must defend themselves because *"depending on the armed forces"* will result in them dying *"one by one. The ethnic cleansing must stop"*.

British journalist Douglas Murray, who visited the north last year, reported that *"every village has a similar story. A few days before any attack, a military helicopter is spotted dropping arms and other supplies into the areas inhabited by the Fulani tribes... thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been displaced... the army fails to perform its most basic duties."*

We understand that youths in Jos are taking matters into their own hands by going on violent reprisals against Muslims who they believe are backed by the Government. Such reprisals cannot be condoned. Clearly, there is an urgent

need for the authorities to enforce the rule of law to protect all its citizens, including minorities. The provision for freedom of worship and association is enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the Nigerian Government has been accused of only occasionally investigating or prosecuting those responsible for abusing religious freedom.



Meeting with Muslim community leaders

Meeting with Bala Mohamed Adam

Bala Mohamed Adam is the New Hausa Community leader in Rayfield and Assistant National Secretary of Izala Sunni Islamic Sect.

“The people of Mai Adiko, Rayfield welcome you and have observed that peaceful coexistence is a major factor in helping humanity to experience stability. We come from different parts of Nigeria. But we are all one family.

“Our forefathers came from all parts to do tin mining, which was brought in by colonial masters, plus by people from outside the country including Cameroon. I

was born here. My father was the last head of the community who was the Captain in charge of mining. Every community brought in by the UK settled okay with locals.

“The source of our problems is politics. The Christian politicians in Church say Christians should vote as Christians. Muslims are the same. It is the politics of religion.

“A lot has happened to us. We’ve been cordoned off, surrounded and attacked. Since the genesis of killings in Plateau, there has been loss of many lives in communities here. We remain steadfast to stay here because there is nowhere else to go. Here, we talk about peace in locality. All of us have stake in this place as there is nowhere to go. So we promote peace.

“My message to the Muslim Community in UK: London brought forefathers to this place. We need assistance. We are Muslims and need to help youth who are idle. Our fathers and grandfathers brought here are elderly now. The UK Government should help them with things that will make life better. Because the UK, which brought our forefathers to this place, have returned home. Tin mining is no longer there. People are left unable to send children to school or vocational training. The quality of State education is very poor.”



Anguldi IDP Camp in Jos [Photo credit: The Revd Canon Hassan John, Global Christian News]

Conclusion

Immediate engagement: The Nigerian administration has taken steps to counter the Boko Haram insurgency. However, it has not demonstrated the same commitment to tackle the escalating violence perpetrated by Fulani herders.

Narrative: The UK Government and mainstream media characterise these pre-planned, ideologically-motivated attacks as ‘ethnic riots’ or ‘tit-for-tat tribal clashes between farmers and herders’. While the causes of violence are complex, the asymmetry and escalation of attacks by well-armed Fulani upon predominately Christian communities is stark and must be acknowledged.

International recognition: This situation fulfils the criteria of genocide and should be recognised as such, with the responsibility of the international community to respond accordingly.

Research: There is an urgent need for visits by international government representatives to investigate the situation and to reassure the local communities.

Regional forum: Conferences amongst Sahelian countries of West Africa should be convened regarding the situation with the Fulani and the way violent mercenaries invade Nigeria.

Long-term solution: There needs to be recognition that the setting up of grazing reserves for Fulani can never be more than a temporary measure and that nomadic farming is economically non-viable.

Rehabilitation: As suggested in the National Assembly of Nigeria, a special Reconstruction Fund should be established to rehabilitate the victims and communities, as has happened with the victims of Boko Haram attacks.

Preventative action: Assisted dialogue should be promoted between local sedentary Fulani and farming communities to help prevent local Fulani from being recruited by violent elements.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to all who met us and shared information and experiences. We are particularly profoundly grateful to those who, despite the pain, told us their personal stories of horrendous suffering, with great courage.

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The burnt remains of civilians killed by Fulani herders

Appendix

Extracts of a speech by the President of the Church of Christ in Nations, Revd Dr Dachollom Chumang Datiri, on the visit to President Muhammadu Buhari

“The Church Of Christ In Nations (COCIN) is a Christian denomination that came into being as a result of the missionary work of Dr. Helmann Karl Kumm... Our membership has grown to about 3 million across Nigeria. We also have Churches in UK, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa.

“...Mr President, we wish to confirm to you that COCIN has her headquarters in Jos with about 65% of the population of Plateau State being her members. This we believe gives us first-hand knowledge of the true facts on the ground.

“Your Excellency, in the last eighteen years, COCIN as a denomination has suffered destruction of lives and property more than any church or any community. The devastation in terms of massacre of lives and destruction of property is unimaginable.

a) Pastors and members in their thousands have been killed in cold blood, either shot dead or slaughtered like animals or burned to death. Houses and businesses have been burned or looted and farmlands have been destroyed.

b) In the North East, COCIN has suffered losses more than anybody in Yobe, Borno (Maiduguri, Gwoza, Chibok, etc.) and in Adamawa States. And yet, despite the huge government intervention in that area, very little relief has come to COCIN and her members, if any. We are aware that a lot of government intervention in terms of relief material has gone to the North East. Unfortunately, our members in that zone have been left out of the distribution.

c) In Tafawa, Balewa and Bogoro LGAs of Bauchi State where COCIN boasts of more than 90% of the population, lives lost are in their thousands and property destroyed estimated in billions of Naira. We have also suffered heavy losses in Taraba, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna States, etc.

d) In Plateau State, the lives lost have been in thousands, and property destroyed have been in billions of Naira. This year alone, the devastation has not only been enormous but unbelievable. Even on the day you visited

Jos in March and launched the Peace Roadmap, Your Excellency, lives were being massacred in Bokokos and Bassa Local Government Areas. And in June, over three hundred people (about 350) were massacred, slaughtered in cold blood over a period of three days in Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas. Since then, almost on a daily basis, people are either ambushed and shot dead or attacked in their homes and killed in cold blood, or killed on their farms.

“The narrative has been that these people are killed by unknown gunmen, or suspected herdsmen, or that there have been farmer-herders clashes. All these are deceptive narratives deliberately framed to conceal the truth and continue to perpetrate the evil.

“The truth is that our people have been attacked and killed by Fulani Militias heavily armed with sophisticated guns including AK47, machine guns, and Rocket Propelled Grenades.

“After the attacks it is the Fulani herders that settle and graze their cattle on the farms of the victims. Are we to believe that the armed forces sent to keep peace go with the instructions to protect them? The implication is that they protect the aggressors and leave the victims mercilessly helpless.

“The proficiency and mode of operation in all of these attacks, as testified by the surviving victims, leaves us in no doubt of the complicity of the military being used as hired mercenaries by the Fulani militias. On this, we are disappointed, and sadly so, that Government has not delivered on her constitutional responsibility of protecting lives and property.

“...Hereunder is a summary of some of the affected areas:

Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas, 23-25 June 2018

- i. Number of Displaced persons – 1714*
- ii. Number of Houses burned – 474*
- iii. Number of farmlands destroyed – 1430*
- iv. Number of Churches destroyed – 12*
- v. Number of persons killed – 350*

Bokokos Local Government Area, March 2018

- i. Number of Displaced persons – 5,617*
- ii. Number of House destroyed – 2,513*
- iii. Number of villages dislodged – 7*
- iv. Number of Churches destroyed – 9*
- v. Number of persons killed – 43*

Bassa Local Government Area, September 2017- October 2018

- i. Number of displaced persons – 11, 457*
- ii. Number of Houses destroyed – 1,345*
- iii. Number of villages dislodged – 16*
- iv. Number of Churches destroyed – 9*
- v. Number of persons killed – 253*

On the Plateau, with the attacks on communities in Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, and Riyom; as well as in Jos North Local Government in the recent past as seen above, there are not less than thirty-eight thousand (38,000) refugees in over ten IDP camp, with very little or grossly inadequate government intervention. The church has been overstretched trying to provide succour to these poor victims of man’s inhumanity to fellow human beings.

“...The Church has always been the last hope for the poor, downtrodden, depressed and broken. It is the first place for rehabilitation. If the IDPs are resettled in their various communities, their usual meeting points are their Churches, schools and hospitals established by the same Church. The Church buildings and institutions should be rebuild...”

*Revd Dr Dachollom Chumang Datiri
President of the Church of Christ in Nations
6 November 2018*