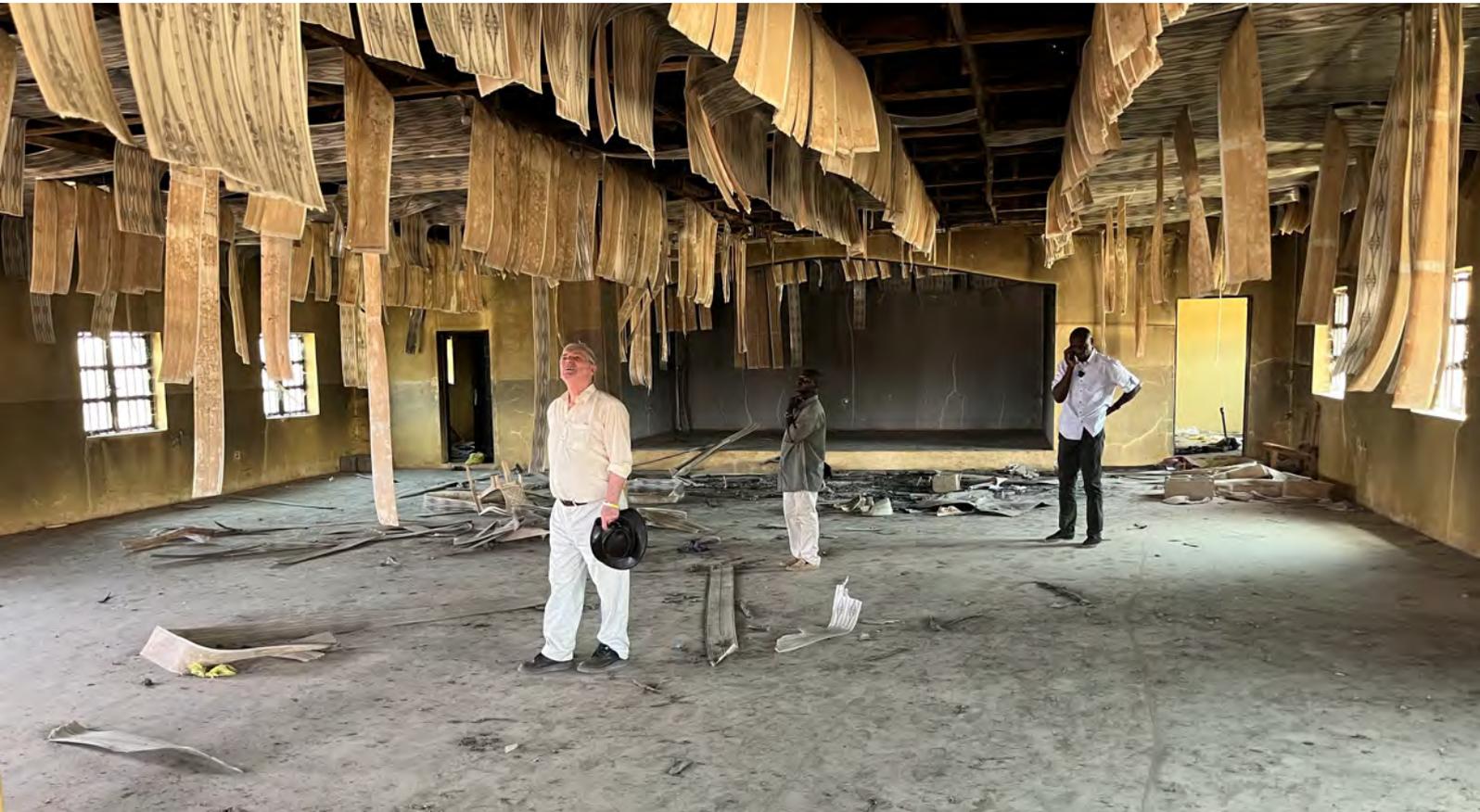


JOINT VISIT REPORT
MARCH 2022

BREAKING POINT IN CENTRAL NIGERIA? TERROR AND MASS DISPLACEMENT IN THE MIDDLE BELT



Ruins of Jebbu Orphanage Chapel in Miango, Plateau state, burned by Fulani militia in August 2021



Humanitarian
Aid Relief Trust



INTERNATIONAL
ORGANISATION FOR
PEACE BUILDING
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



CSI

Christian Solidarity International

“I returned in the morning but everything was burned. I went to my home and saw my mother and siblings butchered and burnt.”

Beatrice, aged 25, Plateau state

“We evacuated before the attack. Fulani militia burnt the orphanage and destroyed the crops.”

Sarah, aged 14, displaced to Abuja

“The kidnappers took me to the place where they ‘waste’ people, and showed me the bodies of other people they had killed. They handed me the phone, and told me to call whoever I could to try to get a ransom.”

Lazarus, a pastor in Jos, Plateau state

“I found my husband had been killed. I cannot go back to my village. It has been burnt. We are barely managing.”

Janet, mother to four children, Plateau state

“Fulani militia see the land as their land. You will see their cows grazing all around. Villagers try to return but they cannot withstand the arms.”

Ejike, pastor in Jos, Plateau state

“We are faced with a war of conquest and occupation. This is an expansion of Islam by force. They are changing the demography of the region.”

Luka Binniyat, Southern Kaduna Peoples Union, Kaduna state

“Fulani militia hit [my son] in the head with a machete. He raised his hand to block the attack, and they hacked his hand. My two daughters started screaming, and they attacked them with machetes too.”

Yakubu, father of four, Miango, Plateau state

“We are repeating the same playbook as Rwanda. We are heading towards breaking point. I don’t know how to emphasise the urgency any more.”

Emmanuel Ogebe, Justice for Jos

CONTENTS

Foreword by Baroness Cox	page 1
Summary	page 2
Introduction	page 3
Survivor testimonies	page 11
Nigerian Government response	page 19
International response	page 22
Local peacebuilders	page 27
Conclusion and recommendations	page 30
Acknowledgements	page 32

**WARNING: CONTAINS GRAPHIC MATERIAL THAT
MAY BE TRAUMATISING TO SOME READERS**



THE BARONESS COX
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FOREWORD

We arrived in Nigeria on day three of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Like so many others, we followed daily news reports of the invasion with horror and grief as bombs fell and families fled. Our hearts break for the husbands, sons and fathers separated from their wives, mothers and children. We hope and pray that the fighting will cease.

As the world's attention turns to Ukraine, we must not forget the suffering of Nigerians. Across Nigeria, tens of thousands have been killed or wounded in horrific terrorist attacks. Millions are displaced. Children cannot go to school, at the expense of their education. Some local observers have gone so far as to describe the rising attacks as a campaign of ethno-religious cleansing. Many are asking the question: is a genocide unfolding in Nigeria?

Ethnic and religious animosity has fuelled conflicts in Nigeria for decades. The emergence of radical Islamist sects in the north has been a source of considerable tension since the country gained independence over sixty years ago. The recent reign of terror inflicted by Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) is well documented. Less well known, however, is the escalation of attacks by Islamist Fulani militia against predominantly Christian communities in the Middle Belt.

I have visited Nigeria many times, to stand alongside HART's courageous local partners in the north and Middle Belt. Yet this was the first time I was advised to fly from Abuja to Jos, rather than travelling by road, due to the increased frequency of killings and kidnappings – another indication that insecurity is worsening in central states.

Despite the scale and nature of the violence, it rarely hits our headlines. The crisis remains out of sight of the world's media. My urgent plea is that we no longer turn a deaf ear to the suffering of Nigerians, including the families, widows and orphans displaced in the Middle Belt. Their plight is deserving of our unwavering solidarity, our constant media interest and an immediate humanitarian response.

The Baroness Cox
Founder President of Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)
Independent Member of the UK House of Lords

PART 1: SUMMARY

Fulani militia¹ attacks continue to escalate in Nigeria's Middle Belt. An estimated 13,000-19,000 killings have occurred since 2009, with countless others suffering life-changing injuries.² The violence has displaced millions and appears designed to reduce the number of indigenous Christians in the region. Inasmuch as the attacks are intended to destroy ethno-religious communities, they may rise to the level of ethnic cleansing or even genocide.

Key findings:

- We witnessed the ruins of homes, farmland, food stores, churches, pastors' homes and an orphanage, all attacked by Fulani militia in the past seven months.
- We heard detailed accounts of the deliberate targeting and slaughter of many children, a 98-year-old woman burned alive and people hacked by machetes as they ran from rapid gunfire.
- The cache of weapons employed by Fulani militia includes automatic weapons, laser sights, machetes, petrol bombs and incendiary chemicals used to burn houses.
- Fulani militia encroach upon and sometimes occupy villages. They assert their right to the land by re-naming the villages and threatening anyone who seeks to return.
- In addition to mass attacks, kidnappings for ransom have become rampant in the Middle Belt, as elsewhere in Nigeria, and appear to have an ethno-religious dimension.
- Targeted villages receive little-to-no military or police protection from these attacks; security forces usually arrive on the scene after the attack has ended.
- Perpetrators of these attacks are rarely, if ever, brought to justice.
- Displaced people in the Middle Belt are forced to rely on aid from under-resourced local churches, small non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or the generosity of their extended family.
- Second-order effects of mass displacement are beginning to be felt: educational outcomes are cratering; use of narcotics among young people is spreading; and young children are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking.
- The security situation is highly volatile, as disparate groups of Christian and non-religious vigilantes begin to undertake reprisals against Muslims.
- Religious tensions are expected to escalate in the run-up to the 2023 election.

¹ As emphasised on pages 8-9, the radicalised armed groups we refer to in this report as 'Fulani militia' comprise only a tiny portion of the Fulani ethnic group, a diverse group of more than 20 million people with hundreds of clans spread across several countries.

² Figures relate to attacks by Fulani militia only (i.e. not Boko Haram or ISWAP) and are collated by in-country human rights groups Stefanos Foundation, Intersociety and the International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice.

This is a Joint Visit Report by Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART), International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice UK (PSJ-UK) and Christian Solidarity International (CSI). Survivor testimonies can be found on page 11. Our recommendations can be found on page 31.



Philip, now aged eight, was asleep in his bed when he was attacked in September 2018. His father told us: “They hit him in the head with a machete. He raised his hand to block the attack, and they then hacked his hand... The attack left Philip’s right eye hanging outside his skull.”

PART 2: INTRODUCTION

A ‘farmer-herder conflict’?

The Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies in northern Nigeria have been extensively covered by journalists and academics, and garnered a great deal of international attention. The conflict in Nigeria’s Middle Belt region has received less attention, but it is no less deadly and no less crucial for Nigeria’s future.

Straddling Nigeria from west to east, and sandwiched between Nigeria’s predominantly Muslim north and its majority-Christian south, the Middle Belt is home to both rich agricultural land and an abundance of mineral resources. Its population is a mix of Muslim communities, mostly from the Fulani and Hausa ethnic groups, and hundreds of smaller ethnic groups, most of which are Christian. Among these groups are the Irigwe, the Adara, the Atyp, and the Birom.

Starting in 2009 – and with a startling rise in intensity in 2015 – armed militias drawn from the Fulani ethnic group have carried out hundreds of attacks on Christian villages, killing thousands and displacing millions.

Because the Fulani traditionally herd cattle, and the indigenous Christians of the region typically farm crops, this conflict has often been characterised as the ‘farmer-herder conflict’. This characterisation is misleading for a number of reasons:

- It obscures the distinction between everyday competition between farmers and herders for resources, which has existed in the region for hundreds of years, and the aggressively systematic attacks that have become so common in recent years.
- It implies that the attacks arise more-or-less spontaneously from conflicts over land access. As several of our interlocutors pointed out, Fulani militia attacks often take place outside the grazing season and outside of regular grazing routes.
- It implies a level playing field between ‘farmers’ and ‘herders’ in the conflict, whereas the ‘herders’ have a clear advantage in firepower,³ and the overwhelming majority of verified victims are ‘farmers.’
- It fails to acknowledge the asymmetrical frequency and scale of attacks by ‘herders’ against ‘farmers’, the types of atrocities committed and the number of casualties.
- It implies that the conflict is between local actors, while numerous witnesses – including those whom we interviewed on this visit – confirm that participants in Fulani militia attacks are often unknown to their victims and speak in accents their victims do not recognise.
- It erases memory and ethno-religious difference from the equation. Among both Fulani Muslims and indigenous Christians, the memory of the jihad of 1804 remains strong. This jihad, led by the Fulani Islamic scholar and state-building Usman Dan Fodio, conquered much of northern Nigeria and tried and failed to incorporate the Middle Belt into the Sokoto Caliphate. The British colonial administration, however, chose to rule the Middle Belt and its peoples through the Sokoto Caliphate, placing Fulani Muslims above indigenous Middle Belters in the colonial hierarchy. The memory of this hierarchy continues to affect the way in which the conflict is interpreted by people locally on both sides.⁴
- It disconnects the conflict from its larger context – the rise of Islamism as a dominant political ideology in northern Nigeria, the imposition of shari’a law in many northern and Middle Belt states, and the cycles of urban communal violence that have followed. Our conversations with Nigerians in the flashpoint city of Jos, for example, show that Fulani militia attacks are closely linked to communal violence in that city, with the former often serving as triggers for the latter.

³ The overwhelming majority of farming villages are unable to defend themselves. Their handful of cock-and-shot Dane guns cannot compete with a militia armed with AK47s.

⁴ See, for example, Moses E. Ochonou, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014)

A grave human toll

The exact death toll in the Middle Belt is unknown. Local human rights groups give counts of between 13,000 and 19,000 people killed in Fulani militia attacks between 2009 and 2021. However, they also acknowledge that this is an undercount. As the Boko Haram insurgency has receded (while not ending), the Middle Belt conflict has replaced it as Nigeria's deadliest. By 2018, the International Crisis Group reported⁵ that six times as many people were being killed in Nigeria's 'herder-famer conflict' as in the Boko Haram insurgency.⁶



Ruins of a home in Atak-Mawe village in Zagon Kataf, burnt in an attack on 30 January 2022. One of the victims was a 98-year-old woman. Locals told us that she was burnt alive. Before throwing her into her burning home, her killers mocked her by saying: "You look cold, Grandma. Come this way."

According to the UNHCR, three million people are internally displaced across all of Nigeria, with around 450,000 displaced in the Middle Belt.⁷ This is a substantial undercount. According

⁵*Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, International Crisis Group, 26 July 2018, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence.pdf>

⁶ Recent mass killings by 'bandits' in northwest Nigeria may now in turn be the deadliest insurgency. In Nigeria as a whole, around 90,000 people have been killed by insurgents or government forces since 2009, with around 40,000 of these killed in the Boko Haram insurgency. See the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Tracker <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483> and *Nigeria's Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, International Organisation for Peace Building and Justice, International Committee on Nigeria, June 2020, <https://www.silentslaughternigeria.com/>. In addition, the death toll indirectly caused by the conflict – indicating Nigerians, especially children, who have died of malnutrition or treatable illnesses as a result of displacement and damage to agriculture and trade – is staggering. The United Nations Development Fund puts the figure at 314,000 in northeast Nigeria alone. See *Assessing the Impact of Conflict on Development in North-East Nigeria*, United Nations Development Fund, June 24, 2021.

⁷ UNHCR, *Nigeria: All Population Snapshot*, 28 February 2022

to Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue state, 1.5 million people have been displaced by Fulani militia attacks in his state alone,⁸ a figure that was confirmed to us by officials at the British High Commission in Abuja. As many religious and civil society leaders told us on this visit, displaced people in the Middle Belt often move in to households in other villages, rather than congregating in IDP camps, making an accurate count difficult.

Community leaders we met also expressed their alarm at the effects of long-term displacement on their people. At this point in the conflict, many people have now been displaced for five years or longer. Separated from their land and traditional livelihoods, many young people are unemployed and uneducated, and falling into drug abuse. Separated from their schools and sometimes their families, a growing number of children are being trafficked for labour and even prostitution.



Eight buildings were destroyed by Fulani militia at Jebbu's orphanage compound in Plateau state, including the chapel, which is now abandoned.

Drivers of communal violence

There are multiple drivers of communal violence in the Middle Belt; some are specific to a local area's history, politics, ethno-linguistic make-up and resource competition.

- Competition for land access between ethnic groups has driven violence in the region, exacerbated by creeping desertification in northern Nigeria

⁸ See, for example, "1.5 million Benue Residents Displaced By Attackers, Farming Activities Halted – Governor Ortom," *Sahara Reporters*, 19 January 2022

- There are economic incentives for insecurity, hence the continuation of corruption and the increase of trading hostages for ransom.⁹
- Religious tensions between Christians and Muslims constitute a significantly exacerbating factor.¹⁰ Relations between the two religious communities have deteriorated dramatically in recent decades. Spaces where Christians and Muslims live together have decreased, both in cities like Jos and in the countryside.
- The escalation of violence must also be seen in the context of the growth of Islamist extremism across the Sahel. This ideology, which has become so widespread in northern Nigeria since the 1980s, is often instrumentalised to inspire, recruit for, and justify attacks, and to determine who is targeted and who is not.¹¹ In response, shared Christian identity often serves as an organising principle for those who mobilise to resist.
- There are political drivers of the conflict, especially as political mobilisation in Nigeria often occurs along ethnic and religious lines. The mass displacement of people from specific ethno-religious groups – in this case, indigenous Christians – produces political benefits for some actors and political disadvantages for others.¹²

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, elections have repeatedly served as triggers for communal violence, as competing politicians and factions try to turn ethnic and religious loyalties to their advantage. Many in the Middle Belt fear that Nigeria's upcoming national elections, scheduled for February-March 2023, will be an occasion for violence on a mass scale, as electoral contests play out against the background of mass displacement and ethno-religious polarisation.

⁹ One estimate from the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union is that Fulani militia receive three billion Naira in ransom each year.

¹⁰ A 2020 report by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief cited "numerous reports that Christian pastors and community heads are specifically targeted." In December 2020, the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, explained why the US State Department designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern: "...a number of terrorist groups are [organising] and pushing into the country... it's often the religious affiliation [that] is used to try to recruit and inspire violent acts." The Bishop of Truro's 2019 Review, whose recommendations the UK Government agreed to implement in full, concludes "the religious dimension is a significantly exacerbating factor" in clashes between farmers and herders and "targeted violence against Christian communities in the context of worship suggests that religion plays a key part." The UK Government claims that "while religion is a factor in many incidents of intercommunal violence, it is not the sole or primary driver of the herder/farmer conflict."

¹¹ Widely-available evidence suggests that extremist ideology is a driver of communal violence in the Middle. There is also anecdotal but extensive evidence of a connection between Fulani militia and Boko Haram. Nigerian security forces have claimed that some Fulani militia are composed of members of Boko Haram, e.g. after a series of killings and arson attacks in Taraba state, the Nigerian Director of Defence Information Major General Chris Olukolade said so-called Fulani militia were arrested, interrogated and identified as Boko Haram. During our visit, we heard first-hand accounts from survivors that some of their attackers 'came from the north', 'are not indigenous Fulani' and 'chanted in a foreign tongue', or that Fulani militia now cooperate with Boko Haram in order to negotiate a higher ransom for hostages. During HART's previous visits, Fulani militia were reported by survivors to have shouted 'Allahu Akbar', 'destroy the infidels' and 'wipe out the infidels'. The case of Zangon Kataf Local Government Area illustrates how Islamist ideology determines the targets in this conflict. Fulani 'herders' have launched multiple and frequent attacks on Christian farming communities in the area, while our interlocutors pointed out that the overwhelming majority of *Muslim* farming communities in the area have gone untouched.

¹² As one Christian activist from Kaduna state pointed out to us: "A lot of our people cannot vote because they are displaced. Muslims have replaced these communities, and they will probably vote in the district that serves their interests."



During daylight hours, local volunteers return to their village in Miango to rebuild a home destroyed in last year's attack. Roofing material was donated by HART. It is too dangerous to be outside at night or to resettle permanently, so the volunteers depart each day at sunset.

Who are the Fulani militia?

The term 'Fulani militia' is used to describe well-armed groups composed of men of Fulani ethnicity who carry out attacks in the Middle Belt. They are distinct from so-called 'Fulani bandits' in the northwest, who mainly attack Hausa Muslim communities, and Fulani in the northeast, many of whom are victims of attacks by Boko Haram.¹³

Fulani militia repeatedly demonstrate a clear intent to target Christian leaders, Christian villages and symbols of Christian identity. Their attacks are organised and systematic. Armed with sophisticated weaponry,¹⁴ they destroy homes, farmland, churches and orphanages. They assert their right to land by settling their cattle, re-naming the village and threatening anyone who seeks to return. According to the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union, Fulani militia have occupied and settled in 145 Christian communities in the southern part of Kaduna state, accounting for some 10 per cent of the region's land.

Unlike Boko Haram or ISWAP, the Fulani militia responsible for the campaign of dispossession in the Middle Belt are not publicly united by a name, a leader, a flag, or any similar identifiers. They are defended and to some extent represented in public by umbrella

¹³ The Nigerian Government, legislators, security forces and Fulani representatives, including the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), have acknowledged that armed individuals of Fulani ethnicity have attacked indigenous communities in central Nigeria since 2009/10.

¹⁴ We heard first-hand reports of the use of automatic weapons, home-fabricated guns, night vision goggles and laser sights, machetes, fire torches, petrol bombs and incendiary chemicals used to burn houses. In previous visits, the HART team heard reports of the use of anti-aircraft guns and rocket-propelled grenades. YouTube propaganda videos show their cache of weapons.

organisations like the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association and clerics like Sheikh Ahmad Abubaker Gumi. Much of their operating structure remains unknown. On our visit, multiple interlocutors expressed the belief that Fulani groups local to the Middle Belt tend to take a backseat in attacks, if they participate at all, but that Fulani villages are used as staging grounds for attacks on neighbouring villages by Fulani militia coming from a distance.

Fulani militia groups should be distinguished from the Fulani in general, a diverse group of more than 20 million people with hundreds of clans. Large numbers of Fulani reside peaceably alongside Christian communities of differing ethnicities across the Middle Belt, including in Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and southern Kaduna states. It would be deeply misleading to implicate the entire Fulani tribe for this violence.



Ruins of a burned home in Zaman Dabo settlement attacked in February 2022. The cache of weapons employed by Fulani militia during similar attacks includes automatic weapons, laser sights, machetes, petrol bombs and incendiary chemicals.

Retaliatory violence

A growing number of local Christian and non-religious vigilantes, often displaced or unemployed youths, have taken matters into their own hands. They conclude that there is no political route to resolving the crisis, and that they can no longer rely on the authorities for protection or justice. Vigilantes therefore create counter-insurgency groups or ‘local armies’, in which young men are mobilised to protect their communities, especially in remote locations where there is no police or military presence.

Following attacks by Fulani militia, vigilantes sometimes undertake violent reprisals against Muslims. They kill perceived enemies indiscriminately, even when their target has no association with a Fulani militia attack. It is ‘jungle justice’, outside the rule of law. The security situation is highly volatile. If left unchecked, there is a real risk of the emergence of an untrained, irregular army of local vigilantes.

Such cases of retaliatory violence have led some commentators to label the Middle Belt conflict as a series of ‘tit-for-tat clashes’, where each side is deemed equally responsible for human suffering. This characterisation overlooks the asymmetry of the conflict. Despite the emergence of vigilante groups, the overwhelming majority of predominantly Christian villages are unable to defend themselves. We heard multiple complaints that the Nigerian military confiscates advanced weapons from these villages, despite the fact that Fulani militia continue to be well-armed. The farmers’ cock-and-shot Dane guns cannot compete with a militia armed with AK47s.

As one Christian activist in southern Kaduna said to us: “If you go to southern Kaduna today, you see communities dotted with mass graves. Let the Fulani show us their own mass graves if it is a ‘clash’.”



Neither the Nigerian Government, nor the US or UK Government, nor any member of the European Union or African Union, nor UN relief agencies operating in Nigeria, have provided adequate humanitarian assistance to displaced people in the Middle Belt. Above, local families gather at St. Mark's Anglican Church in Kurmin Masara, many of whom are displaced from their homes by recent attacks.

Summary of meetings

We visited Nigeria to hear first-hand accounts of recent Fulani militia attacks and subsequent displacements, and to visit the frontlines where these attacks occurred. Among the Nigerians

we spoke to, there was broad agreement on the need for a comprehensive response by the Nigerian Government and international community.

We visited the following villages destroyed or damaged in recent attacks:

- Tegbe village, Miango community, Bassa Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau state (attacked 26 November 2021)
- Jebbu village, Miango community, Bassa LGA, Plateau state (attacked 1 August 2021)
- Atak-Mawe village, Kurmin Masara community, Zagon Kataf LGA, Kaduna state (attacked 6 August 2020 and 30 January 2022)
- Zamon Dabo village, Kurmin Masara community, Zagon Kataf LGA, Kaduna state (attacked 1 and 8 February 2022)

We witnessed homes, farmland, food stores, churches and an orphanage that had been destroyed in Fulani militia attacks. We spoke to survivors of the attacks, as well as survivors of attacks from surrounding villages. Their testimonies are inherently disturbing and build on the evidence from HART's previous visits.

Besides survivors of these attacks, we also met religious and civil society leaders and activists working in the communities affected by this conflict, including:

- Local Muslim and Christian peacebuilders, including Women for Peace (formerly known as the Mai Adiko Reconciliation Project) and the Para-Mallam Peace Foundation's Inter-Religious Forum.
- Local community leaders in Jos, Miango and Zonkwa;
- Archbishop Henry Chukwundum Ndukuba (Anglican Primate of the Church of Nigeria);
- Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi (Anglican Archbishop of the Province of Jos and Bishop of Jos);
- Bishop Musa Mwin Tula (Anglican Bishop of Bauchi);
- Bishop Jacob Kwashi (Anglican Bishop of Zonkwa);
- Gideon and Funmi Para-Mallam (Para-Mallam Peace Foundation);
- Solomon Dalyop (Emancipation Centre for Crisis Victims in Nigeria);
- Richard Ikiebe (International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice);
- Emmanuel Ogebe (Justice for Jos);
- Mark Lipdo and Fatima Njoku (Stefanos Foundation);
- Luka Binniyat (Southern Kaduna Peoples Union);
- Senior advisers at the British High Commission in Abuja.

PART 3: SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES

Philip, now aged eight, was asleep in his bed when Fulani militia attacked him with a machete in September 2018. His father, Yakubu, told us:

“Five days before the attack on our village¹⁵ some Fulani men came through, accompanied by some soldiers. They claimed they were looking for their missing

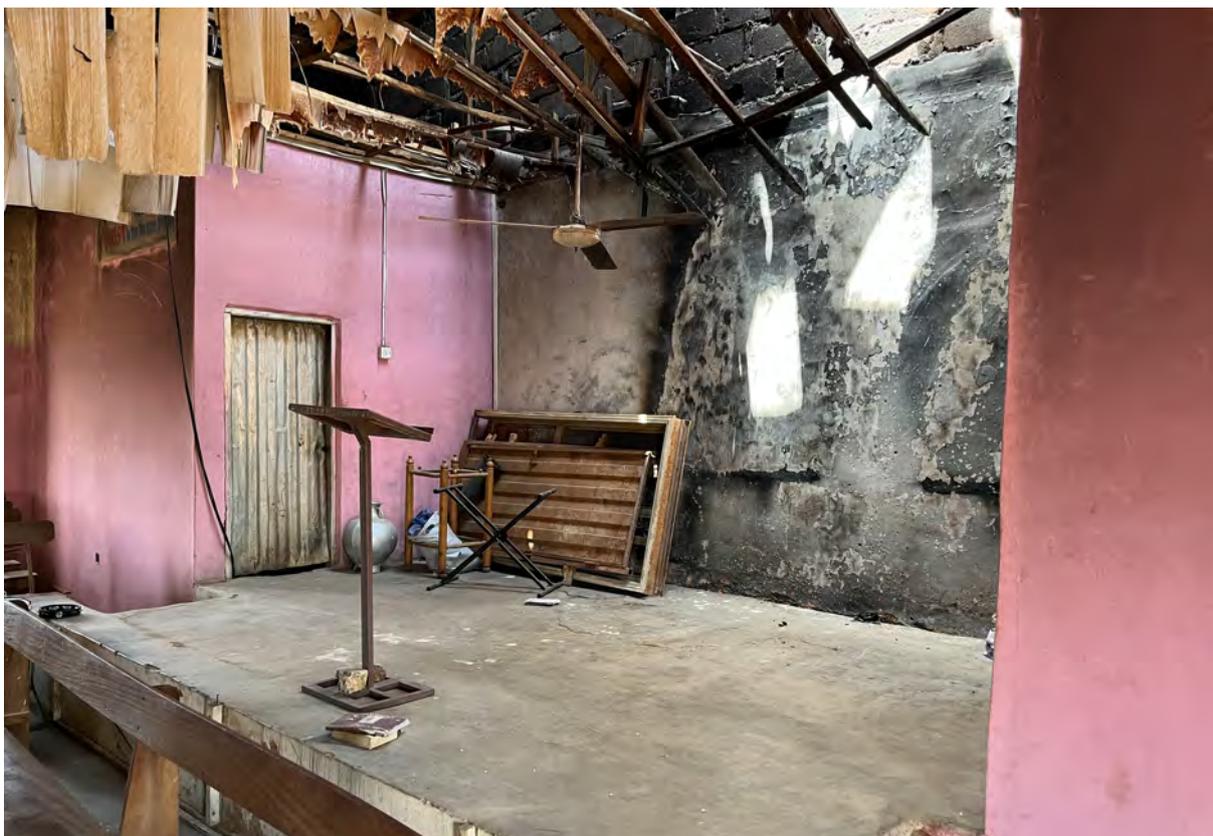
¹⁵ Rukuba Road, Miango Community, Bassa LGA, Plateau state.

brother. We were worried there might be trouble, and for three nights after that we kept watch.

“The attack started at about 7pm. Our village is a stone’s throw from an army checkpoint, but the army did nothing. I heard gunshots and went out to see what was happening. A group of masked Fulani men was entering the village on foot, armed with machine guns and machetes. Two of them wore military uniforms. I hid my two daughters and myself in the house. My son Philip was four years old and sleeping. I was afraid if I woke him, he would cry.

“The Fulani entered my house, and Philip was the first person they saw. They hit him in the head with a machete. He raised his hand to block the attack, and they then hacked his hand. My two daughters started screaming, and they attacked them with machetes too. Then their leader told them to keep moving to the next house, so they left. Their accents were very strange. I did not understand everything they said.

“The attack left Philip’s right eye hanging outside his skull. Because there was a crisis in Jos, it was two days before we could get him to the hospital there. 14 people were killed in the attack on our village, nine from the same family.”



The roof above the altar at Jebbu ECWA Family Church is badly damaged after Fulani militia created a bonfire. Elsewhere in Jebbu, we visited the ruins of an orphanage compound, where eight buildings were completely destroyed in a Fulani militia attack.

Sarah and Blessing, two sisters aged 14 and 11 from Borno state in northern Nigeria, survived a Boko Haram attack in 2015. They fled to the Middle Belt and settled in an orphanage in Jebbu village in Miango, Plateau state. In August 2021, Fulani militia destroyed the orphanage

compound. Sarah and Blessing fled again to the capital Abuja. They have witnessed horrific attacks and endured immense trauma. Sarah described her memory of the attacks:

“We heard someone blow a whistle during prayers at church. Then the shooting started. We ran. We didn’t know where to run. We just ran. We hid in a cave. They [Boko Haram] threw tear gas inside the cave. For days, we kept moving from place to place. We crossed rivers. Children were dying because there was no food for us. People were dying of cholera. It was too dangerous to walk during the daytime, so we moved at night. Boko Haram were everywhere. My grandfather was killed.

“We heard of an orphanage in Jebbu, where we settled. Last year on a Sunday, they [Fulani militia] attacked the compound. We evacuated before the attack. They burnt the place down. They destroyed the crops. God saved us. My mother is being looked after in a different state. We don’t know where the rest of our family are.”



Blessing (left) and her older sister Sarah (right) have been displaced multiple times by Islamist attacks. They survived a Boko Haram attack in Borno state and a Fulani militia attack in Plateau state. Sarah told us: “We have seen so many people killed.”

Whilst in Jebbu village in Miango, we met four widows in their 20s at the ECWA Family Church.¹⁶ The church was partially destroyed in the attack last year – the roof above the altar is badly damaged by fire, although the flames did not engulf the rest of the building.

Each of the widow’s husbands were killed in an attack by Fulani militia in a nearby village on 10 January 2022. Beatrice, aged 25, explained what happened:

“I am only alive because I did not sleep in the room that was attacked. I escaped to the nearest village at night. I returned in the morning but everything was burned. I went to my home and saw my mother and siblings butchered and burnt.”

¹⁶ ECWA (“Evangelical Church Winning All” – formerly “Evangelical Church in West Africa” – is a prominent Christian denomination in the Middle Belt.

We visited Tegbe village in Miango community. It was attacked by Fulani militia in 2018, when 5-10 people were killed, and again on 26 November 2021, when 18 people were killed.



On 26 November 2021, 18 people were killed in Tegbe village in Miango. The same village was attacked three years earlier. Over 7,500 homes in the area have been destroyed since 2000.

Tegbe is one of a series of villages attacked in Miango in November-December 2021. Across Miango, 15 villages have been attacked by Fulani militia in the previous 12 months. Over 7,500 homes in the area have been destroyed since 2000. In Tegbe village, we were told about the attack in November 2021:

“They set the houses on fire. Those who were inside the house were burnt together with their children. Others were shot. There was a family who had a sick relative, so they had gathered in the house to take care of him. Six of them were shot and killed inside the house.”

Janet, a mother of four, was displaced from her home after an attack on her village, Kamaru in Miango community, on 27 February 2022 – the day after our arrival in Nigeria. She said:

“I was nursing my child when I heard gunshots. It was around 7pm. My husband told us to get out: ‘the Fulani are coming!’ We fled into the bushes and slept there. In the morning, I found my husband had been killed. I cannot go back to my village. It has been burnt. We are barely managing.”



Janet's husband was killed by Fulani militia on 27 February 2022. She told us, just days after his death: "I cannot go back to my village. It has been burnt. We are barely managing."



The altar at Jebbu Orphanage Chapel, where Fulani militia set fire to music equipment and chairs.

Lydia is from Jol village in Riyom LGA in Plateau state. She said:

“My village has suffered Fulani attacks many times since 2001. My husband, Denke, was a farmer. He was killed during one of the attacks on 2 October 2018. I was pregnant. 13 people were killed, and the village was burned down. They destroyed the vicarage. Our church had been destroyed in a previous attack. Some of the attackers wore military uniforms. They included both local Fulani and Fulani from far away.

“Since the attack, some of us have been able to go back. But when we farm, the Fulani push in their cattle and eat up our crops. They have occupied most of the surrounding villages.”

Rose is from Miango community in Plateau state. Her husband, a Christian pastor, was killed by Fulani militia on 7 April 2020. Rose told us that the Fulani militia targeted the church where he worked:

“My husband was ordained to pastor the ECWA Church in January 2020. It was his first posting. I was pregnant at the time, and I had travelled to Kwall for an antenatal appointment the next day. So I was absent on the night my husband was killed. Three others were killed as well.”



Seven courageous mothers greeted us in St. Andrew’s Cathedral in the Zonkwa Diocese, all of whom were displaced by an attack by Fulani militia on Kududo village on 9 February 2022. Ten people were killed. Their local church, vicarage and 118 homes were destroyed.

In Zagon Kataf LGA in southern Kaduna, we visited a series of villages that have been attacked recently by Fulani militia. Eleven people were killed when Atak-Mawe village was attacked

on 30 January 2022. One of the victims was a 98-year-old woman. Locals told us that she was burnt alive. Before throwing her into her burning home, her killers mocked her by saying: “You look cold, Grandma. Come this way.”

Luka Binniyat, of the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union, took us to his home in the Zaman Dabo settlement in Zagon Kataf LGA. The village is now deserted – from a population of 5,000, only a few youths remain to guard the remaining homes. The settlement was attacked on 8 February 2022 and Luka’s cousin was burned in his home.¹⁷

Seven mothers greeted us in St. Andrew’s Cathedral in the Zonkwa Diocese, all of whom were displaced by an attack by Fulani militia on Kududo village on 9 February 2022. Ten people were killed. Their local church, vicarage and 118 homes were destroyed. One of the mothers, Ruth, has seven children. She told us:

“At about 2:15am they entered the village. They began by shooting from the outskirts and burning houses. They burnt everything including animals. Hardly anything survived. Ten people were killed. My brother was killed. Three Anglicans. Three Catholics. And three from ECWA. Some were burnt, others shot, others macheted.”



Lazarus was travelling from Kaduna to Jos when he was kidnapped by Fulani militia. They took him “to the place where they ‘waste’ people” and showed him the bodies of other people they had killed.

Lazarus, a Christian pastor, was travelling from Kaduna to Jos when he was kidnapped by Fulani militia on 4 August 2021. After enduring 28 hours of torment and abuse, he was released for a ransom of 900,000 Naira.

¹⁷ Binniyat a Nigerian journalist and human rights activist. For more information about his ongoing case, see page 21.

“The kidnappers stopped us on the road at about 7:30pm. There were eight of them, all between the ages of 18 and 23. They forced my driver and I to walk for 16 hours without shoes. They wanted to take us to Sambisa, but the kidnappers’ bosses failed to send a car for us. They ordered the kidnappers to take what they could get from us, or else just ‘waste’ us. They took me to the place where they ‘waste’ people, and showed me the bodies of other people they had killed. They handed me the phone, and told me to call whoever I could to try to get a ransom.”

Lazarus’ story sheds light on the complicated religious dynamics of this conflict. According to Lazarus, his captors treated him with more respect when they learned that he was a pastor. They told him that both pastors and imams are corrupting the country; religion is just a business for them, just as kidnapping is a business. Yet these seemingly a-religious kidnappers were all Fulani Muslims, and their superiors in the kidnapping network had initially ordered them to take their captives to Sambisa in Borno state, one of Boko Haram’s best-known safe havens. Even when kidnappers and attackers are not themselves motivated by extremist ideologies, they can be used by those who are, and conflict still plays out along religious lines, in this case with Muslims in the role of kidnappers and Christians in the role of abductees.

Fulani militia are responsible for most of the attacks in the Middle Belt in recent years, but Boko Haram and its affiliates remain active in the region. In January 2020, Boko Haram abducted and beheaded Revd Lawan Andimi, chair of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa state. The video of his beheading was posted online.



Mary is traumatised by the video of her husband’s beheading: “When I go into my thoughts, I forget where I am... Without my husband, I do not have enough income to support my children.”

Revd Andimi’s wife, Mary, a mother to nine children, told us:

“On the day of my husband’s abduction, we saw the pick-up trucks coming towards us. They raised their guns at him and took him into the truck. I ran with my children to the hills. We hid for the night.

“No one knew where he was, or if he was still alive, until days later a video was posted online. People tried to hide the video from me. I fainted. People tried to calm me down. He was on his knees and praying when they killed him. He was beheaded. [We were later told it was several chops of the machete to the back of his neck.] Boko Haram called me afterwards to mock me.

“Without my husband, I do not have enough income to support my children. I sold a cow to raise enough fees to pay for school. Lots of people have made promises to help, but almost no promises have been fulfilled.”

PART 4: NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Justice for victims

Since the Fulani militia insurgency began in earnest over seven years ago, the Government has been unable to stop the violence. It has failed to ensure justice or recompense for victims, including villagers who attempt to return to their farms. During our visit, we heard time and again that people who try to reclaim their land cannot withstand the gunfire from Fulani militia. Perpetrators of these attacks are rarely, if ever, brought to justice by Nigerian authorities.

Protection for victims

In the areas of all the attack sites we visited, the army presence was visible. On the main roads to and from each community, we encountered multiple manned checkpoints and armed vehicles, and sometimes full army bases. Nevertheless, we consistently heard that, even though villagers called the army for help during attacks, soldiers arrived only after the attack was complete.

Local Christian activists point to the case of Zangon Kataf LGA in southern Kaduna as an example of the military’s biased approach to the conflict. Zangon Kataf town is largely populated by Hausa Muslim farmers, while the surrounding Zangon Kataf local government area is almost entirely Christian. In 1992, there was communal violence in the LGA, during which local Christians came out on top and killed many Muslim civilians. The Nigerian government dealt severely with the perpetrators and deployed the military to protect Zangon Kataf town. The Nigerian military continues to protect the town until today.

Our contacts on the ground were convinced that numerous Fulani militia attacks in Zangon Kataf LGA are staged from within Zangon Kataf town, taking advantage of the protection offered by the military. They also criticised how much more difficult it is to get the military to protect Christian villages in the same area, and how few perpetrators of crimes against Christians have been brought to justice.



One of the destroyed buildings at Jebbu's orphanage compound, which is now deserted.

According to local reports, supported by evidence published by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, elements of the Nigerian Government may be complicit in violence and only occasionally investigate or prosecute those responsible for such crimes.¹⁸

In March 2018, the former Army Chief of Staff and Defence Minister, Lt General Theophilus Danjuma, warned that the armed forces were, “not neutral; they collude” in the “ethnic cleansing in ... riverine states” by Fulani militias and 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.”¹⁹

The State's failure to protect its citizens in central Nigeria is a clear breach of its obligations under international law with respect to human rights. There is now an urgent need to ensure adequate protection and aid for those suffering the loss of family members and the destruction of their homes and livelihoods. The State must end impunity by ensuring that complaints related to human rights violations are promptly, independently and impartially investigated, and those responsible are held to account after fair trials.

¹⁸ *Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, June 2020, <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/nigeria-unfolding-genocide-new-appg-report-launched/>

¹⁹ “Danjuma asks Nigerians to defend themselves against killers, says ‘armed forces not neutral,’” *The Cable*, 24 March 2018, <https://www.thecable.ng/danjuma-asks-nigerians-defend-killers>

Freedom of expression

While the Nigerian Government appears unable or unwilling to prevent or punish attacks on Middle Belt villages, Nigerian authorities at both state and federal levels have acted vigorously to suppress criticism of this inaction.



Luka Binniyat took us to his home in the Zaman Dabo settlement in Zagon Kataf. The village is now deserted – from a population of 5,000, only a few youths remain to guard the remaining homes. He said: “We share the world’s horror at what is happening in Ukraine. But no one seems to care what is happening here.”

Luka Binniyat, a veteran journalist and the spokesperson of the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union, has suffered terribly at the hands of the authorities. He was arrested on 4 November 2021 following a dispute over his reporting on the massacre of 38 Christians at Madamai village. For relating a third party’s criticism of the state government, he was charged with ‘cyberstalking’. After 90 days in detention, during which the venue for his case was repeatedly changed and judges on multiple occasions simply did not show up for his hearings, he was finally freed on bail on 3 February. The charges against him have not been dropped.

Prison conditions in Nigeria must include, according to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, basic standards of hygiene, provision of food, access to natural light and fresh air, and recreation. The horrific conditions in the prison where Binniyat was held in did not meet these standards:

“The food in prison – I don’t think my dog would eat it. My cell had 120 men inside. We slept like sardines. We queued all night to use one toilet. The place stinks like hell.

“The police cells are even worse. I stayed there for six days. On average there, three people die each week, sometimes under torture. Sometimes they bring people out at

night and kill them. It is hot and dark. I have met people who have almost gone blind, having spent so long in the dark. It is awful. Awful, awful, awful.”

Binniyat was previously imprisoned for his reporting on Fulani militia attacks for over 100 days in 2017. He is one of many journalists and whistleblowers in Kaduna state targeted by the administration of Governor Nasir Ahmad Elrufai:

- Midat Joseph, a reporter for the newspaper *Leadership*, was arrested in 2017 for comments he made about the crisis in a WhatsApp group.
- In 2018, a broadcast journalist named Segun Onibiyo was detained for thirty days for comments he made about the killings in southern Kaduna on social media.
- In September 2020, Dr. Obadiah Mailafia, the former deputy governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, was interrogated by security agents and later forced into hiding after he publicly charged the Government of complicity in the attacks in Kaduna.
- In January 2021, the journalist Ibanga Isine was forced to flee Nigeria after he received death threats related to his investigative report about the killings in Kaduna.

Steven Kefas, a well-known journalist from southern Kaduna, spent 162 days in prison in 2019, after he was abducted by state agents in Port Harcourt. His offense had been writing an article about the massacres of Adara people in Kajuru LGA of Kaduna State. Like Binniyat, he suffered terribly in prison: “In detention, I was subjected to psychological torture... I faced a myriad of health challenges after my release, including a liver illness caused by a deadly virus.”²⁰

In the context of the ongoing killings in the Middle Belt, and the manifest failure of the state to respond adequately, such persecution of journalists and whistleblowers is nothing short of outrageous. Journalists must be able to do their jobs freely and safely, without fear of reprisal, censorship or arrest. This is especially important when it comes to holding governments to account in a context of widespread human rights violations and probable atrocities.

PART 5: INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Regrettably, neither the Nigerian Government, nor the US or UK Government, nor any member of the European Union or African Union, nor UN relief agencies operating in Nigeria, have provided adequate humanitarian assistance to displaced people in the Middle Belt. Nor is there much sign of international engagement to bring the attacks in the region to an end.

UK Government response

Despite the scale of killings and displacement since 2009, the UK has not provided humanitarian assistance in Nigeria’s Middle Belt. It supports a handful of worthwhile but small locally-led projects to promote inter-faith dialogue, including those implemented by the Para-Mallam Peace Foundation in Jos, Plateau state. Such a minimal response from the UK does not reflect the urgency of the humanitarian and security crises.

HART partner Revd Hassan John coordinates multiple aid programmes among the worst-affected communities. He told us:

²⁰ Steven Kefas, ‘How the Kaduna State government persecutes journalists who report on genocide,’ *Nigeria Report*, 12 January 2022, <https://www.nigeria-report.org/commentaries-3/kefas/>

“I can say categorically that none of these villages have received security or humanitarian assistance from the Government of Nigeria or elsewhere. They are forced to rely on aid from local churches or small NGOs, or they receive no aid at all. After an attack, families in neighbouring villages do what they can to absorb and care for their relatives. In one room recently, I saw 40 people sleeping on the same floor.”

The FCDO regularly reviews its geographical footprint to re-assess where assistance may be required. To date, it has directed all of its resources to Nigeria’s northeast and northwest – over £2 billion of bilateral aid since 2011 – whilst failing to support displaced communities in central Nigeria, claiming that “the scale of the problem doesn’t match the scale of our resources.”



Beatrice, aged 25, managed to escape an attack by Fulani militia on 10 January 2022. Her husband and several family members were killed: “I returned in the morning but everything was burned. I went to my home and saw my mother and siblings butchered and burnt.”

The 2022 UK-Nigeria Defence and Security Partnership has received mixed reviews. While it is encouraging to observe a shared commitment to strengthen the principles of democratic governance and respect for international humanitarian and human rights law,²¹ it is unclear how many of the desired action outcomes relate to ending large-scale violence in the Middle Belt. We anticipate the Partnership will seek to consolidate its resources in the northeast and northwest. Central Nigeria is consistently overlooked.

The Truro Review, commissioned by the then UK Foreign Secretary in 2018, provided a detailed account of Fulani militia attacks in Nigeria’s Middle Belt. It concluded:

²¹ In February 2022, Nigeria and the UK agreed to enhance cooperation in the following areas: civilian policing; approaches to stabilisation including civilian-led security and civil-military co-operation; human rights; women and youth; peace and security; defence co-operation and maritime security; serious and organised crimes, drug trafficking, human trafficking and border security; and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

“Fulani attacks have repeatedly demonstrated a clear intent to target Christians, and potent symbols of Christian identity... the situation for Christians in parts of the country has deteriorated.”

Since the Truro Review, the UK Government pledged to adopt all 22 recommendations, including: to name the phenomenon of Christian persecution; to recognise the potential for religious identity as a key marker of vulnerability; to ensure mechanisms to facilitate an immediate response to atrocity crimes; and to ensure training in religious literacy. Almost three years later, we observed no meaningful impact from this pledge in central Nigeria.



A local pastor's home in Miango, burned down in last year's attack, is being rebuilt by volunteers with handmade bricks.

US Government response

In 2020, we commended the US State Department for designating Nigeria as a ‘Country of Particular Concern’ with regard to religious freedom violations. We also welcomed their recognition of escalating ‘religious-tinged violence’ and the need for a comprehensive response.

We are deeply disturbed by the US State Department's decision in November 2021 to reverse this designation. Their decision gives a green light to Fulani militias to continue their killings, abductions and land-grabs. As Revd John Joseph Hayab, the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kaduna state, who met with Secretary of State Tony Blinken on his November 2021 trip to Nigeria, said after the decision was made public:

“I expressed how disappointed the Christians in Nigeria were following the US’ deletion of Nigeria from the CPC list. What I said to Blinken was that, because Nigeria still has grave problems with religious persecution, his action was like that of a doctor discharging a patient from the hospital, even though the patient is critically ill. What that signifies is telling the patient to go home and die.”²²

Given the scale and depth of suffering, we urge the US State Department to reverse its decision and to shine a light on the numerous massacres, torture and abductions comprising severe violations of religious freedom in Nigeria.

More importantly, the US Government as a whole should use its influence and good relationship with the Nigerian Government to advocate for the protection of displaced communities in the Middle Belt, and take action against elements of the Nigerian Government that are complicit in these attacks. It would be destructive for the US to sacrifice long-term stability and civilian security in Nigeria for the sake of a more cordial relationship with the current Nigerian administration.

EU and AU response

The European Union (EU) is one of the leading contributors of humanitarian aid in Nigeria, providing over €340 million since 2014. EU support is focussed on stabilisation and recovery in the north, particularly the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, which have been hit by the Boko Haram conflict. This excludes the Middle Belt, such as Benue, Kaduna and Plateau states, where millions are displaced.

European Union and African Union leaders met for the sixth EU-AU summit in Brussels on 17 and 18 February 2022. Their rhetoric and concluding statements were encouraging,²³ albeit similar to previous summits, which have not had any meaningful impact on the Middle Belt’s humanitarian and security crises.

International Criminal Court (ICC) response

Over ten years ago, the ICC opened a preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria, including crimes committed in the context of the ‘herder-farmer conflict’ in the Middle Belt.

The examination was concluded at the end of 2020. The outgoing Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, stated then that “the statutory criteria for opening an investigation into the situation in Nigeria have been met” and said that she would refer the findings to the Pre-Trial Chamber as the final step before an investigation is official opened. Ms. Bensouda cautioned, however, that a lack of financial resources might prevent the Court from moving forward, urging stakeholders to provide the resources required for an investigation.²⁴

²² Revd John Hayab, “The Untold Stories of Religious Persecution in Nigeria,” *Nigeria Report*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.nigeria-report.org/hayab/>

²³ AU and EU leaders emphasised a shared commitment to: strengthen peace operations of African defence and security forces; support law-enforcement capacity-building; promote the rule of law and compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law.

²⁴ “Statement of the Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, on the conclusion of the preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria,” *International Criminal Court*, 11 December 2020, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=201211-prosecutor-statement>

The preliminary examination of Nigeria lasted a full decade. It would be a tragic outcome if “capacity constraints” were to obstruct the Court’s ability to fulfil its mandate in a country where crimes against humanity abound and go largely unchallenged by the Nigerian authorities.

The question of genocide

Many international activists and leaders on the ground in the Middle Belt use the word ‘genocide’ to describe the attacks on their communities. As far back as 4 July 2018, the Nigerian House of Representatives declared killings in predominantly-Christian villages in Plateau state to be a genocide and called on the Federal Government to establish immediately orphanages in areas affected by violence.²⁵ Yet their urgent plea was ignored. During our visit, human rights lawyer Emmanuel Ogebe, representing Justice for Jos, told us:

“No one is held to account for atrocities. We are repeating the same playbook as Rwanda. We are going down the same path. We are heading towards breaking point. I don’t know how to emphasise the emergency anymore. The Rwandan genocide was first labelled a ‘farmer-herder conflict’, and look what it became. Rwanda is the size of a Nigerian state. The world will not be able to cope with the consequences.”

Ogebe’s concerns are echoed by the Nigerian human rights group PSJ (International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice), which has produced a legal brief arguing that Boko Haram and Fulani militia attacks against Christians constitute genocide.²⁶ Jubilee Campaign similarly argues that the term is legally applicable, in a report to the International Criminal Court,²⁷ while CSI has issued a Genocide Warning for Christians in Nigeria²⁸ and the UK’s All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Religious Freedom or Belief published a report about the Middle Belt crisis in 2020 entitled ‘Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?’²⁹

Inasmuch as Fulani militia attacks aim to eliminate indigenous Christian groups from their historic lands, it is clear that they meet the 1948 Genocide Convention’s definition of the crime: “(a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”, with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” The indiscriminate killing of women, children and the elderly, the destruction of crops, homes, livelihoods, the occupation of villages that have been cleansed of their Christian inhabitants and the use of violence to prevent their return, all point to the eliminationist impulse that defines genocide and ethnic cleansing as crimes.

²⁵ “House Designates Plateau Killings as Genocide,” *This Day* (Nigeria), 4 July 2018, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/07/04/house-designates-plateau-killings-as-genocide/>

²⁶ *Nigeria’s Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, International Organisation for Peace Building and Justice, International Committee on Nigeria, June 2020.

²⁷ *Nigeria: This Genocide is Loading. Finding a Reasonable Basis to Believe Crimes Against Humanity Occurred*, Jubilee Campaign, 18 November 2020, <https://jubileecampaign.org/jubilee-campaign-submits-report-to-the-icc-describing-how-genocide-is-loading-in-nigeria/>

²⁸ “CSI Issues Genocide Warning for Christians in Nigeria, Calls on Permanent Members of the UN Security Council to Act,” *Christian Solidarity International*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.nigeria-report.org/2020/01/30/csi-issues-genocide-warning-for-christians-in-nigeria/>

²⁹ ‘Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief’, June 2020, <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/nigeria-unfolding-genocide-new-appg-report-launched/>

According to Article 8(2)(b)(ix) and (e)(iv) of the Rome Statute to the ICC, “intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes... provided they are not military objectives” constitutes a war crime. This is also clearly recognised in the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which forbids the “seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions dedicated to religion, charity and education, the arts and sciences, historic monuments and works of art and science.” In view of the targeting of churches, schools, and orphanages in Fulani militia attacks, these statutes are also relevant.



Burned crops in Jebbu, Miango.

The longer the violence is allowed to continue, the worse the ethnic and religious polarisation in the Middle Belt becomes. The Nigerian Government and its international allies must do everything possible to eliminate the incentive for people in affected communities to organise and join armed groups outside the rule of law – a factor that is widely recognised to precede genocide in many societies. Policymakers should be attuned to the fact that the current violence is designed to destroy specific ethnic and religious communities. This sets the stage for even worse mass violence along ethno-religious lines.

PART 6: LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS

We were encouraged to encounter locally-led peacebuilding programmes on our visit, including Women for Peace, the Para-Mallam Peace Foundation, and Roads to Hope. Each project has made a positive impact on its community by serving Muslims and Christians, who might otherwise be caught in a cycle of sectarian confrontation. Their work is especially relevant in the context of violence in the Middle Belt, where traditional mediation mechanisms between nomadic herdsman and settled farmers have broken down.

Women for Peace

Women for Peace, formerly known as the Mai Adiko Peace Project, is located in the heart of Rayfield, Jos – a community that has suffered heavily from poverty and inter-religious violence. The project is led and attended by 40 women (20 Christians and 20 Muslims) who work together to coordinate educational activities, computer and literacy classes, baking, sewing and soap-making. After 9-18 months of skill acquisition, funds are raised to provide loans for women to generate an income and become self-sufficient. Women for Peace is a pillar of reconciliation in the community, embraced by local imams and pastors.



Members of the delegation with the inspirational Muslim and Christian leaders of Women for Peace, based in the flashpoint city of Jos, where tensions are high between each faith group.

Para-Mallam Peace Foundation

The Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation is a non-governmental faith-based organisation, currently in receipt of a small grant from the UK Government. Between January-March 2021, the Foundation launched a pilot peace project on ‘promoting inter-religious harmony’ in southern Kaduna. Roundtable discussions between affected communities created a safe space for much-needed dialogue, especially important in the context of communal tension and violence. Gideon told us:

“Our roundtable discussions might not produce immediate results, but with patience things will become clearer. Peacebuilding is sometimes a slow process. It is a marathon and not a sprint... Future generations will be grateful that we laid a solid foundation for justice and sustainable peace.”



The Gideon and Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation's Inter-Religious Forum, promoting peace, reconciliation and security in Plateau state.

Roads to Hope

HART has partnered with the Anglican Diocese of Jos to provide safer education to thousands of displaced children in central Nigeria. The concept of the partnership is simple: given that it is unsafe for children to travel to school, the 'Roads to Hope' van brings school to children. The van is driven to displaced students, fully equipped with books, pens, a whiteboard, an electronic monitor and a solar-powered generator.

The majority of beneficiaries are indigenous Christians, due to the nature of the sectarian conflict and subsequent mass displacement of predominantly-Christian villages. Beneficiaries also include Fulani Muslims, including young girls, whose families are affected by communal violence.

Since the project was launched in October 2021, the education van has reached over 25 villages in Miango and Amobisa village in Jengre. More vehicles are expected to launch in 2022, which will serve Zonkwa and nearby villages in Kaura local council in southern Kaduna, reaching an additional 1,500 children each month. Plans are also underway to expand the project to include mobile health vans.



When it is unsafe for students to travel to school, ‘Roads to Hope’ brings school to the students. Between October 2021-March 2022, the van reached 1,920 children from over 25 villages in Miango and 250 children in Amobisa village in Jengre.

PART 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflict between nomadic herdsman and settled farmers has existed for a long time. For centuries, although disputes would arise, leaders would resolve them by compensating losses or sharing resources. In 2016, the Anglican Bishop of Bauchi, Musa Mwin Tula, warned us that “this historic menace between herdsman and farmers 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.”

Today, the Bishop’s warning has been realised. Well-armed Fulani militia frequently attack villages in the Middle Belt. The attacks are planned and coordinated, with a demonstrable goal of driving out indigenous Christian populations and seizing their land. We have visited and personally witnessed the results of recent land-grabs, massacres, atrocities, kidnappings and forced displacement.

Nigerian authorities at both the state and federal levels appear unable or unwilling to prevent the attacks, and instead engage in legal prosecution of journalists and activists who draw attention to the crisis. The international community appears similarly indifferent, providing no meaningful engagement in favour of ending the violence or humanitarian assistance to the millions displaced across central Nigeria.



The delegation pay respects at the grave of Sarah, the wife of the chief of Zaman Dabo. Aged 80, she survived the attack on her village, but died soon afterwards of heart failure linked to the trauma.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian authorities must **end impunity** by ensuring that complaints related to human rights violations are promptly, independently and impartially investigated, and those responsible are held to account after fair trials.
2. There is an urgent need for the Nigerian authorities to **enforce the rule of law** to protect all its citizens. Following an attack by Fulani militia in central Nigeria, it must not be left to local vigilantes to take matters in their own hands.
3. Analysts anticipate increased communal tensions in the build-up to the 2023 election. The Nigerian Government must **provide additional and adequate security** for vulnerable communities and displacement camps, including farms and villages in central Nigeria at risk of Fulani militia attacks.
4. Where Nigerian military forces are overstretched, and where it is appropriate to do so, the **police should be mobilised** to carry some of the burden of protection of civilians.
5. Nigerian authorities must **cease persecuting journalists and whistleblowers** who draw attention to their failures.
6. The US Department of State should **reverse its decision to remove Nigeria from its list of 'Countries of Particular Concern'** regarding religious freedom.
7. As part of its ongoing geographical footprint review, the UK Government must **ensure immediate humanitarian assistance for displaced people in the Middle Belt**, in addition to aid provided to the northeast and northwest.

8. EU member states and UN aid agencies should **allocate more resources to the Middle Belt**, which is suffering a crisis of displacement at least as intense as that in the northeast and northwest.
9. The US and UK Governments must use their seats at the UN Security Council to **seek a resolution that significantly enhances the security given to communities** in central Nigeria at risk of attack.
10. Signatories to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide must fulfil their obligation **to prevent and to punish** the crime of genocide in the context of Nigeria's Middle Belt.
11. Stakeholders of the International Criminal Court (ICC), including the UK and Switzerland, should **increase financial support to the ICC** to ensure a full and thorough completion of the Nigeria investigation.
12. International NGOs, religious leaders and reconciliation specialists should consider how to work alongside local communities to **provide trauma healing** to families suffering the loss of family members and the destruction of their homes and livelihoods, including children who have turned to drugs and who may be vulnerable to radicalisation or trafficking.
13. Where it is unsafe for children to go to school, the Nigerian, US and UK Governments should support the **roll-out of mobile education vans**, such as those piloted by HART, including stipends for displaced teachers. Similar provisions should be made for mobile healthcare units.
14. Local peacebuilding projects in central Nigeria should be supported in their endeavour to **reconcile Muslims and Christians**, who might otherwise be caught in a cycle of sectarian confrontation.

PART 8: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

We wish to thank all who arranged our complex and balanced programme and all who offered us traditional generous Nigerian hospitality. We also wish to thank the Anglican Primate of the Church of Nigeria, and senior staff at the British High Commission, for the opportunity to meet in Abuja.

For more information about Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART), International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice UK (PSJ-UK) and Christian Solidarity International (CSI) visit:

www.hart-uk.org
www.psjuk.org
www.csi-usa.org