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✖ An uneasy calm prevailed in Plateau state, Nigeria, Monday following the killing of hundreds of Christians early Sunday morning in three farming villages near Jos by ethnic Fulani Muslims.

The mostly ethnic Berom victims included many women and children killed with machetes by rampaging Fulani herdsmen. About 75 houses were also burned.

State Information

Commissioner Gregory Yenlong confirmed that about 500 persons were killed in the attacks, which took place mainly in Dogo Nahawa, Zot and Rastat villages.

“We were woken up by gunshots in the middle of the night, and before we knew what was happening, our houses were torched and they started hacking down people” survivor Musa Gyang told media.

The assailants reportedly came on foot from a neighboring state to beat

security forces that had been alerted of a possible attack on the villages but did not act beforehand.

The attack on Sunday is the latest in several religious clashes in the state in recent months that have claimed lives and property. Plateau state is a predominantly Christian state in a country almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims. The Muslim minority has been contesting ownership of some parts of the state, leading to frequent clashes.

Bishop Andersen Bok, national coordinator of the Plateau State Elders Christian Fellowship, along with group Secretary General Musa Pam, described the attack as yet another “jihad and provocation on Christians.”

“Dogo Nahawa is a Christian community,” the Christian leaders said in a statement. “Eyewitnesses say the Hausa Fulani Muslim militants were chanting ‘*Allah Akbar*,’ broke into houses, cutting human beings, including children and women with their knives and cutlasses.”

Soon after the militants besieged Dogo Nahawa, the Christian leaders said, at 1:30 a.m. they contacted the military, which is in charge of security in the state.

“But we were shocked to find out that the soldiers did not react until about 3:30

a.m., after the Muslim attackers had finished their job and left,” they stated. “We are tired of these genocides on our Christian brothers and state here that we will not let this go unchallenged.”

Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) President Ayo Oritsejafor decried the attack on the Christian community as barbaric and urged the federal government to stop the killing of innocent citizens or risk a total breakdown of law and order.

“I have just returned from a trip abroad,” he said. “While I was away, I was inundated with reports of another catastrophe in the Jigawa state capital, where several churches were burnt, and just as I was trying to settle down and collate reports from the field, I am hearing of another on Sunday morning.”

Director of Social Communications, Catholic Archbishop of Lagos, Rev. Monsignor Gabriel Osu said the Sunday killing in Jos is a major setback for the country’s effort to gain the confidence of the international community.

“Do you know that because of things like these, anywhere Nigerians travel to they are subjected to dehumanizing scrutiny?” he said. “Any act of violence at this time is totally condemned, and the government should make haste to fish out all identified perpetrators of such heinous crimes against God so that we can move forward as a

people united under one umbrella.”

On Friday the National Youth President of the PFN, Dr. Abel Damina, expressed concern over cases of clandestine killings of Christians in remote parts of Plateau state by Islamic extremists and called on the federal government to retrieve sophisticated weapons in their possession.

“Even as I speak to you now, I am receiving reports that some clandestine killings are still going on in the remote areas of Plateau State by the fundamentalists,” Damina reportedly said. “They pounce on Christians and kill them without anybody knowing much of their identity except that they are Christians.”

He added that recently he visited the governor in Jos regarding the crisis and secured photos of Christian victims.

“Young men, Christians, were going to their farm to harvest their produce and the fundamentalists pounced on them,” he said. “They were called infidels. At the last conference, we received reports with photographs of the fundamentalists using AK-47 rifles to destroy our churches. Where did they get the arms from? We have reports of truck loads of arms that had been intercepted, and we did not hear anything about them.”