

7-Year-Old Boy Shot in Anti-Christian Attack

As a Baptist church member tried to fight off an armed Muslim Fulani herdsman in a village in north-central Nigeria, he told his 7-year-old nephew and other relatives to run.

The boy remained, crying and calling for help.

Jerome, whose real name is withheld for security reasons, recalled how gunshots woke him and his family around midnight on May 3 in Gwanje village, 18 kilometers (11 miles) from Akwanga in Nasarawa state. His account of a relatively limited attack gives a glimpse of how hundreds of Christian families have been terrorized by herdsman, according to Morning Star News.

A neighbor rushed over to tell Jerome's father that he had received a call that the herdsman were attacking from the south and coming toward their home north of the village.

Jerome's father, 39, told his younger brother, 21-year-old Istifanus Arewa, to take the family into hiding in a forest 200 meters away. As Jerome fled with his uncle, mother and grandmother, the herdsman began to shoot at them, the boy said.

"My uncle pulled me down and asked my mother and grandmother to also lie down on the ground in order to avoid the bullets that were being shot at us," Jerome told Morning Star News. "As we lay there on the ground, one of the herdsman came to where we were and pointed his gun at my uncle. When the Fulani man was about to shoot my uncle, my uncle jumped up and grabbed him, and they began to wrestle each other."

Arewa shouted for them to run, the boy said.

"My mother and grandmother ran away while I stood there crying and calling for help," Jerome said. "But as this was going on, another Fulani man shot me, and the bullet hit me on the upper side of my right shoulder. I fell down and crawled under a thick shrub."

Morning Star News said he watched as his uncle and the other Fulani wrestled. The herdsmen who shot Jerome then turned and shot at his uncle, who was holding tightly to the other Fulani.

"The shooting brought the two of them down, and after sensing that he killed both my uncle and the other Fulani, the Fulani man left," Jerome said. "I ran back to the village and saw an open door to a room in another house, where I entered and hid. I was in there until my parents and other people found me in that room the following morning."

Arewa died trying to save his relatives, said Jerome's father, whose identity is withheld for security reasons.

"My younger brother, in order to protect the little boy, my wife and mother, braved it to wrestle with the armed Fulani man," he said.

He confirmed that the shot that killed his brother instantly also killed the other Fulani.

"This singular act by my brother, who fought with his bare hands against the Fulani man, forced the herdsmen to retreat," he said. "If this bravery and heroic act by my younger brother had not happened, the herdsmen men would no doubt have killed us all and burned down our homes."

Arewa was a member of the Men's Missionary Union of the Bishara Baptist Church in Gwanje, he said.

Morning Star News reported that at about 5 a.m. the next day (May 4), family members returned to the village from the

forest and found the corpses of Arewa and the Fulani, said Jerome's father, a lay leader in the Baptist church.

"My little son, who throughout the night of the attack was missing, was found by us in a room where he ran into and hid himself," he said. "He took us to the spot they were shot at, and we found the corpses."

Wounded Christian

Also wounded that night was Moses Ayuba, a 29-year-old member of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Gwanje. He received treatment for serious injuries at the Federal Medical Center, Keffi, in Nasarawa, relatives said.

In the southern end of Gwanje village, Ayuba was shot in his hand and waist, his father, Ayuba Para, 65, told Morning Star News.

Para said that his son went out after hearing the sound of gunshots, thinking they came from police who usually patrol the area.

"Unfortunately, on this night, the policemen were not around, and so my son ran into the herdsmen who were invading the village, and they shot him," Para told Morning Star News. "And when I heard him crying, I ran out to the spot only for the herdsmen to shoot at me. I narrowly escaped being killed as I ran into the bush behind my house."

After shooting Ayuba, the herdsmen left, he said.

The herdsmen attack on Gwanje village was the second in two weeks on Christian communities in Akwanga County.

For his part, Jerome's father said he was saddened that the Nigerian government has taken no serious measures to end such attacks.

"I'm not happy about these unnecessary attacks on innocent

Christians in Nigeria,” he said. “There’s the need for the government to act to end these killings. I plead also, that other fellow Christians pray for an end to these killings. We are in need of God’s peace in our country.”

Christians make up 51.3 percent of Nigeria’s population, while Muslims living primarily in the north and middle belt account for 45 percent.

Nigeria ranked 12th on Open Doors’ 2019 World Watch List of countries where Christians suffer the most persecution. {eoa}

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