

Gunmen Open Fire During Church Service, Kill 19

Gunmen opened fire during a Nigerian church service Tuesday, killing at least 19, including two priests.

State police told CNN the attackers were most likely Fulani herdsman who continued their crusade by burning down 50 homes.

"They attacked the venue of a burial ceremony and also attacked the church where the two reverend fathers were holding mass," police commissioner Fatai Owoeni says. "We were able to recover 16 bodies from the scene of the attack and those of the two priests."

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari tweeted, "This latest assault on innocent persons is particularly despicable. Violating a place of worship, killing priests and worshippers is not only vile, evil and satanic, it is clearly calculated to stoke up religious conflict and plunge our communities into endless bloodletting."

U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to meet with Buhari next week. Christian advocates implore the president to use this time to pressure Buhari to defend Christians.

"I implore President Trump to leverage his April 30 meeting with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari to insist upon meaningful protection for Christians who continue to be violently attacked by President Buhari's own people group: Fulani herdsman," said David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA.

"President Buhari has done nothing more than issue empty words of condolence as villages have been burned and thousands of religious minorities have been slaughtered. President Buhari's willful inaction has meant attacks by the Fulani are becoming

more deadly and sophisticated. Even the Nigerian House of Representatives has summoned President Buhari to account for these non-stop, religiously motivated attacks. President Trump has a great opportunity to influence the situation and help hurting religious minorities in Nigeria.”

Charisma News previously reported that Nigerian Christians were preparing themselves for increased Islamic crusades that might include mass murder.

Asso parish priest Father Alexander Yeyock said: “The sad implication of [these attacks] is mass murder for Christians in the northern part of Nigeria, especially the northeast and middle-belt regions.”

Tuesday’s church attack occurred in Nigeria’s Middle Belt.

Open Doors ranks Nigeria at No. 14 on their World Watch List for persecuted Christians.

“In the northern and Middle Belt regions, they suffer from violence perpetrated by Islamic militant groups,” according to the report. “Death, physical injury and loss of property are commonplace, as well as loss of land and livelihood. In northern Nigeria, society as a whole treats Christians as second-class citizens who deserve to be discriminated against and excluded. Christians from Muslim backgrounds also face persecution from their own families who reject and pressure them to renounce Christianity. To make matters worse, corruption has made the government ill-equipped to protect Christians from violent attack.”