

20 Churches Destroyed, 100 Christians Murdered in March

More than 20 churches have been destroyed by Fulani herdsmen during attacks on communities in Benue State, Nigeria.

The attacks in Nigeria's "Middle Belt" started early in March but resumed March 23 in the town of Gbajimba, in the Guma Local Government Area. The attacks have claimed more than 100 lives of local Christian farmers of the Tiv tribe.

Benue State is 95 percent Christian, and the rest mostly Muslim.

Benue Gov. Gabriel Suswam on March 11 escaped injury when his convoy was ambushed by Fulani herdsmen who engaged his security aides in gunfire at one of the affected villages in the Guma area.

The Muslim Fulani, believed to be from neighboring states, have attacked a number of communities, killing Tiv farmers and setting their houses ablaze.

The Tiv are a major ethno-linguistic group in Benue State who mainly depend on agriculture. The Fulani are a migratory ethnic group, some of whom are herdsmen in northern Nigeria and across western and central Africa.

The cause of the March 23 attack from by the Fulani cattle herdsmen, who have lived with the Tiv for ages, is not clear, but an indigenous farmer said there has been growing tension between the two groups.

"The Fulanis with their cattle have been destroying our land, and we have been killing their cattle. So they may be fighting back since they have to feed their cattle," the farmer told World Watch Monitor, which is withholding his name to preserve

his safety.

Yiman Orkwar, chairman of the Benue branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria, told World Watch Monitor that 20 churches belonging to the All Nation Evangelical Ministry, of which Orkwar is the leader, have been destroyed.

“It is a two-prong attack to take over our land and convert the people left in these places to Islam, but we resist,” he said. “They have been killing everybody they find in the villages. They butcher women, children and others. What they are doing is barbaric and very similar to the attacks by the Boko Haram terrorists.”

Orkwar said Nigeria’s federal government has not shown enough concern about the attacks by the Fulanis in Benue State, and called for the deployment of soldiers to the region.

“The federal government cannot allow the genocide going on in Benue State to continue,” he said on March 25. “Today, another 14 persons have been killed by the Muslim group. We can’t allow this indiscriminate killing to go on.”

Following a meeting between Orkwar and the Muslim-Hausa Community leader, the two issued a joint statement asserting that the Muslim and Hausa communities do not sanction the violence. It asks Christian and Muslim leaders to remain faithful to joint statements of peace made throughout churches and mosques.