

Assassination Attempt Fuels Governor's Fire to Stand Up to Terrorism

On Oct. 13, Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State, Nigeria, granted an interview to Nigeria Report about the crisis in his state. Over the past five years, raids by Fulani militias have killed hundreds and forced 1.5 million of Benue's 6 million people to flee their homes. In recent years, Governor Ortom has become known for his spirited defense of the people of Benue State and his fiery criticism of President Muhammad Buhari's handling of Nigeria's security crisis.

Nigeria Report/Christian Solidarity International: Gov. Ortom, seven months ago you survived an assassination attempt. How has this attempt on your life shaped your approach to the violence in your state?

Samuel Ortom: I was attacked at my farm in March of this year because I have been branded as someone who is the enemy of the Fulani. But the attempt on my life strengthens my resolve to fight on behalf of my people. The Constitution of Nigeria clearly states that the responsibility of any government is to assure security for lives and property. Everyone in the country knows that the Fulani are after me, but I am protecting my own people, and even beyond them, I am standing up for the Christian community in the rest of Nigeria. I am not worried about all these threats against me because I am a born-again Christian, I stand for the truth and I believe that God will be able to help me.

NR: How has this terrorism impacted your state?

Ortom: The attacks of the Fulani terrorists have brought devastation to Benue State. They come, kill and take over the land. More than 1.5 million people in our state are displaced,

out of 6-7 million total. This devastation is not unlike that you find in the northeast that are affected by the terrorism of Boko Haram, ISIS and the Islamic State West Africa Province. But the federal government tries to conceal the suffering of my people in Benue State from the outside world. They even try to deny that there are 1.5 million internally displaced persons. Some international aid groups are currently trying to verify the reality, and I hope that the truth will come out.

The U.N. agencies are present, but they are not adequate. They focus on the states of the northeast where Boko Haram and ISWAP are perpetrating violence. Those terrorist groups, unlike the Fulani terrorists, strike government targets as well as the civilian population.

When you talk about 1.5 million IDPs, that is a huge population. More than 50% are children. More than 30% are women. Some stay in schools or abandoned buildings, some stay in the open air, and some are staying with their extended families. The attacks are creating miserable poverty for just about everyone in Benue. The reason why the federal government does not provide adequate humanitarian aid and obstructs aid from the international community is the same reason why it protects those who commit the violence against our people. It is because there is resistance in Benue State and other parts of the Middle Belt to the Fulani Muslim domination. This is what they do to those who stand in their way. I feel the pain of my people. God has sustained us for five years of intensive attacks. I trust that He will help us.

Read the rest of this interview at this link. {eoa}

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