

Nigerian Bishops Demand President Buhari Step Down After Christians Massacred There

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has urged the country's president to step down in the wake of a massacre at a church last week.

Muhammadu Buhari was due to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington on April 30 and is expected to discuss strategies for fighting terrorism.

On Tuesday, April 24, around 30 armed men, believed to be Fulani herdsmen, stormed a Catholic church in Ukpor-Mbalom community, in the central Benue state, killing 19 people, including priests Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha.

The massacre prompted the Nigeria's House of Representatives to summon Buhari over the killings (on April 25). The assembly also passed a vote of no confidence in the country's service chiefs for the armed forces and all the security advisers to the president.

The lawmakers in the lower legislative suspended sitting for three days in solidarity with Nigerians over the killings. The Catholic bishops denounced what they called a "carefully planned" and "wicked" act, in a statement issued on April 26.

In the statement, titled 'When will this barbarism end?', they said that over the last two years, they have consistently expressed their concerns over the way the president is handling the ongoing violence.

They particularly expressed their lack of confidence in the

security agencies, which they said “the president has deliberately placed in the hands of the adherents of only one religion.”

“The bloodletting and the destruction of homes as well as farmlands have increased in intensity and brutality,” the bishops said. “Now our churches have been desecrated and our people murdered on their altars.”

They said Christians in Nigeria feel “violated” and “betrayed”, adding: “If the president cannot keep our country safe, then he automatically loses the trust of the citizens. He should no longer continue to preside over the killing fields and mass graveyard that our country has become.

“Repeated calls from us and many other Nigerians on the president to take very drastic and urgent steps to reverse this ugly tragedy that threatens the foundation of our collective existence and unity as a nation, have fallen on deaf ears.

“It is clear to the nation that he has failed in his primary duty of protecting the lives of the Nigerian citizens. Whether this failure is due to inability to perform or lack of political will, it is time for him to choose the part of honor and consider stepping aside to save the nation from total collapse.”

Nationwide Protests

Yesterday (April 29), thousands of Christians staged a peaceful demonstration against the continued killings by herdsmen across Nigeria. The protests were organized under the aegis of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the main umbrella of churches in Nigeria.

The chairman of CAN for Benue State, one of the main affected by Fulani violence, also called for Buhari’s resignation.

“The barbaric, mindless and well-planned massacre of Benue people has no doubt brought tears running down the cheeks of everybody in Benue State,” said Rev. Akpen Leva, as Nigeria’s Vanguard magazine reports.

“It is a fact that the silence and the indecision of the federal government is rather an encouragement to the militant herdsmen to perpetrate all these evil upon the people of Benue State.”

Various advocacy groups, including Open Doors International, have called on President Trump to seize the opportunity to call Buhari to account for allowing unchecked atrocities against Christians in his country.

“The violence perpetrated by militant elements of the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria is chilling—in the last year, 50 Christian villages have been destroyed and thousands have been killed. As the leader of Nigeria and a Fulani himself, President Buhari is strategically placed to bring an end to this violence,” wrote Zoe Smith, Open Doors’ head of advocacy. “Open Doors is joining with others around the world, calling on President Trump to raise this as a matter of urgency with President Buhari in their conversations on Monday.”

Meanwhile, Nigeria’s Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, said the situation in some parts of the country could degenerate into a “genocide” if the government fails to take a decisive action, as Nigeria’s *Premium Times* reports.

“We must go beyond arresting a token handful of herders caught with arms—there are still hundreds of them in the forests. It is not enough to back the anti-open-grazing laws, so late in the day, but we shall leave that for later,” he said.

“The plain expression is ‘ethnic cleansing’ and we must not beat around the bush. The shade of Rwanda hangs over the nation.” {eoa}

This article originally appeared on World Watch Monitor.