

Communal Violence Kills at Least 27 in Central Nigeria

Clashes between rival ethnic groups in central **Nigeria** killed at least 27 people on Wednesday, witnesses said, in a region straddling the country's largely **Christian** south and mostly **Muslim** north that is prone to civil unrest.

Witnesses said armed Fulani herdsmen attacked the villages of Da Jak and Attakar in Plateau state in the early hours, spraying residents with automatic gunfire and torching houses.

"They came at night and overran the village. They were shooting people, just murdering, and burned down the houses," villager Dung Sati told Reuters. "Many of my kinsman have stayed away because they are homeless now."

On his return he counted 27 bodies, he said. Another witness who fled the scene of the **attack**, Pam Samuel, said by telephone there were 28 bodies when he came back.

The military declined to comment, but a Plateau state legislator, Daniel Dem, told Reuters dozens had been killed.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and top oil producer, has a roughly equal Christian-Muslim population and more than 200 ethnic groups who mostly live side by side in peace.

But conflict sometimes flares up in Plateau and other parts of the "Middle Belt." Plateau state in particular has suffered for decades from violence linked to land disputes between the semi-nomadic, cattle-herding Fulani and settled Berom farmers.

Violence in Plateau can quickly escalate—more than 50 people were killed inside a week in September 2011, and hundreds died earlier that year.

The unrest is unrelated to the **Islamist** insurgency raging in Nigeria's north, although Islamist militant group **Boko Haram**

sometimes bombs churches in Plateau with the apparent aim of stoking ethnic and religious tensions.

Reporting by Buhari Bello and Isaac Abrak; Writing by Tim Cocks; Editing by Toby Chopra.

© 2013 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.