

Nigerian Army Accused of Helping Muslim Extremists Slaughter Ethnic Christians

Muslim extremists with the alleged help of Nigerian army personnel killed 24 Christians this month in central Nigeria's Plateau state, area sources said.

The attacks started Aug. 11 in Ratsa Foron village, where assaults that day and on Aug. 15 left six Christians dead; also on Aug. 15 in Heipang village, Muslim extremists killed nine members of one Christian family along with another Christian, the sources said.

"They were in army uniform. I even know some of them; they came along with the Muslims to attack us," said a tearful Nnaji John, who lost her family in the attack. "I can swear to God Almighty that the attack was carried out with the support of the soldiers; I saw them."

Attacks on Aug. 21 in Kwi, Loton, and Jwol villages killed six more Christians, said the sources, who added that Nigerian army soldiers participated in the assaults or at least accompanied the assailants.

In the community of Chwelnyap in Jos on Aug. 14, Muslim extremists killed two Christians and injured one woman, the area sources said.

Chollom Gyangof Chwelnyap confirmed that the Aug. 14 attack on his neighborhood was carried out with the support or tacit approval of Muslims in the army's Special Task Force (STF), a unit designed to stop sectarian attacks.

"The attackers were the very soldiers deployed to the area to ensure protection of the people," Gyang said. "One of the

victims received a call from the STF men in the area to come out and assist, only to get gunned down by them as he stepped out from his house.”

Gyang said area residents found identification cards of Muslim soldiers, berets and other pieces of their uniforms in the villages that were attacked.

Plateau Gov. Jonah Jang called for immediate withdrawal of the Nigerian army because, he said, Muslims in the army have taken sides with Islamist assailants.

“I am convinced that the armed forces are being polluted with the religious crisis in the country,” Jang said. “Before now, the military personnel used to stay in the barracks, but today the armed forces have started taking sides in this religious crisis, and if they are not called to order it will be dangerous for the country.”

Bitrus Kaze, representative for Jos in Nigeria’s National Assembly, said in a recent press conference that there have been other times that military ID cards and pieces of uniforms have been found at the scene of sectarian attacks.

“It is a very sad testimony of the STF,” he said. “And what worries me is that in spite of that grievous allegation, it appears to me that STF has not come out, at least to deny it. It is really very strange and worrisome to me that in a scene of such a heinous crime, where a family of nine was wiped out, and an allegation of this nature was leveled against the military, it says nothing about it.”

Capt. Charles Ekeocha, spokesman of the task force deployed to Heipang to stop the attacks, did not expressly address the allegations, but he confirmed the number killed in the attack and said, “My troops went to the area to repel the attack.”

Sources told Compass the slain family members at Heipang village, who were associated with the Redeemed Christian

Church of God, were Nnamdi John, Ekeoma John, Ebere John, Elechi John Aboh, Gift Amechi, Ighechi Amechi, Amarachi John, Obed Amechi, Uchenna Amechi; the other area Christian was Joseph Davou.

Sources said those murdered in Ratsa Foron were Pam John and his son, Elijah; Gwom Gyang; Deme Dung Tsok; Samuel Gwom; and Adamu Gwong.

Daniel Deni, who represents Riyom in the Plateau State House of Assembly, confirmed the attacks on Jwol, Kwi, and Loton villages'

"Three Christians were killed in Loton village in Jos district, while the other was killed in Kwi, all in Riyom Local Government area," he told Compass by phone. "In fact as I am talking to you, I am in the bush with the sector commander and his men, and they are in search of the attackers."

Alamveabee Efihraim Idyorough, a Christian who lives in the Jos suburb of Anaguta, said his neighborhood has been attacked multiple times over the past 10 years.

"Do Christian ethnic minorities not have the right to exist in Nigeria?" Idyorough asked. "Are Christians not citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria?"