

Nigerian Churches Raise Funds for Persecuted Christians

The most dangerous country for a Christian to live during 2012 was, arguably, Nigeria. That's what research for the 2013 edition of the World Watch List shows up: it's produced by the global Christian organization Open Doors, whose researchers monitor the **persecution** of Christians worldwide.

"Between November 2011 and October 2012, we recorded 1,201 killings of Christians worldwide (which gives an average of 100 killings a month!), of which 791 happened in Nigeria", reports the World Watch List. Most of these were in church attacks—from the capital Abuja, across mid to northern Nigeria in cities such as Jos and Kaduna, and through to Sharia-law Northern states such as Borno, Bauchi, and Yobe.

Boko Haram, which has caused havoc in Africa's most populous country through a wave of violence, is fighting to overthrow the government and create an Islamic state. A former Defence Minister Theophilous Danjuma on Sunday, March 3 described the north of Nigeria as being in the middle of a civil war declared by the religious sect.

Many Christian families have fled many of the Northern states of Nigeria and the tiny minority of those who remain live in permanent fear of attack from armed men. Despite the deployment of the government's Joint Task Force, a special army-police unit, security is fragile there.

Now, Nigeria's leading para-church umbrella grouping of Christian denominations, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), is launching a fund to raise money to support victims (and their surviving relatives) of the **Boko Haram** militant Islamists' attacks, which have claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people since 2009, according to Human Rights Watch.

Of Nigeria's estimated 160 million population, about 70 million are Christians. CAN is their most representative umbrella group, comprising five major denominational groups: the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Organisation of African Instituted Churches, and the Evangelical Fellowship of West Africa.

The fund received a welcome initial donation this week, with a visit by the Chairman of Trustees of an associated US-based group, the Christian Association of Nigerian Americans, CANAN. Its members have donated \$50,000, presented during a ceremony held on 4th March in Abuja.

General Secretary of CAN, Rev. Musa Asaki told World Watch Monitor that CANAN's was the first major donation to the planned fund, which according to him is already being disbursed to many displaced victims who urgently need financial assistance.

"Before this donation, we'd concluded plans to formally launch the fund, especially because the government has not been forthcoming in catering for Christian victims, while it's reported it has paid 100 million Naira (\$666,400) to the family of the late leader of the Boko Haram sect".

"We've been given much material and financial support for victims by Christians and Church organizations. CAN President Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor particularly has donated a lot to victims but now we're going public to get as much support as we can, for as many victims as possible.

"Nigerian Christians nationwide have demonstrated before now that they are truly their brothers and sisters' keepers in the way they've supported victims. We're sure they will do more when the fund formally launches" Asaki said.

He added that it was unfortunate that the activities of the terrorists have not been curtailed and have been allowed free

rein, especially in attacks on innocent Christians in their homes.

“We heard that CAN is setting up a Relief Fund where Nigerians can donate money and materials to support the victims”, said CANAN’s Chairman of Trustees at a press briefing.

Dr. James Fadele called on the generosity of individuals and organisations in Nigeria to support the initiative launched by CAN. “If backers of terrorists are raising money to perpetuate acts of terror, supporters of and advocates for peace can no longer look the other way. We call on Nigerian philanthropists, businesses and captains of industry, well-to-do individuals and all people of good will to consider the financial plight of the victims, lend a hand and help CAN to assist” Fadele stated.

He said CANAN’s donation will cater for scholarships for children of victims and other needs.

CANAN was launched in New York in 2012 by US-based Nigerian Christian leaders and professionals. It has been advocating for the end of **Boko Haram** violence in Nigeria.

Boko Haram followers are said to be influenced by the Quranic phrase which says: “Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors”.

While it also targets mullahs from other Islamic traditions and government security forces, a huge number of Christian churches, congregations and individuals have been attacked.

Survivors of the violence attended the fund’s launch to tell how they lost relatives or property.

From North-Eastern Borno State, Deborah Shetima described how her husband was shot dead in front of her, and how their two daughters, 7 and 9, were taken away by his killers on April

25, 2012. Since then she has not had news of them. Three months later, her third son was shot too.

A pastor from Kano narrated how eight members of his church were killed in a single attack on Feb. 23, 2013. The attackers asked for the names of individuals on a factory site with co-workers before opening fire on the Christians.

Another victim from Borno explained how he was shot in the mouth in front of his wife and children for refusing to renounce his religion. Surviving with a perforated mouth, he went to hospital for surgery.

CANAN called on the Nigerian government to do more to protect the lives of Nigerians.

It also urged President Goodluck Jonathan to seek support from other countries, like the United States, in order to tackle the Boko Haram threat.

Meanwhile, the president on March 7 made his first visit to Yobe State in the North East (Boko Haram's powerbase) since he came to power in 2010. In a symbolic visit to Maiduguri and Damaturu, he ruled out the possibility of granting amnesty to Boko Haram militants for now, as demanded by some Northern leaders.

Goodluck Jonathan said it was not possible to negotiate an agreement with terrorists whose identities and demands are unclear. "You cannot declare amnesty for ghosts," he said.