

Pastor, 3 Sons Burned Alive, Among at Least 20 Slaughtered in Latest Massacre

A spate of attacks, in which at least 20 were killed in Nigeria's central Plateau State over the last week of August, has shattered peace efforts by religious and political leaders in its capital, Jos.

Three months ago, heavily armed Fulani militants stormed 15 villages across the same Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA), predominantly Christian, over the weekend of June 23-24, killing more than 230 in a "co-ordinated military style," as described by the local Stefanos Foundation.

More than 11,500 people were forced to seek refuge in 13 locations across the state, while an undetermined number were injured.

The June violence, one of the deadliest episodes in recent years, forced the state governor, Simon Lalong, to impose a dusk to dawn curfew on the three affected LGAs—Riyom, Barkin Ladi and Jos South—in an attempt to curb the violence.

President Muhammadu Buhari, criticized for his perceived 'lukewarm' attitude to the ongoing Fulani violence in the country, visited Jos to announce an unprecedented deployment of security forces in the region.

However, World Watch Monitor learned that more villages were attacked in the following days. Since then the violence has gone unabated.

On Aug. 28, communities including a mining site at Wereh village (Ropp District), Abonong, Ziyat and Bek villages (Foron District), Nafan, Sagas, Rawuru and Rambuh villages

(Fan District), all in Barkin Ladi, came under heavy attack by Fulani militants.

Victims included a pastor and four members of his family. Rev. Adamu Wurim Gyang, 50, and his three children were set ablaze and burnt beyond recognition. His wife, Jummai, 45, was shot and left to die in a pool of blood. More than 14 were killed in that attack; 95 houses were burned down and 225 farm crops awaiting harvest were destroyed. A youth at the mining site also died.

Joshua Kim, 43, who visited Abonong on Aug. 29 told World Watch Monitor that Fulani came to his village on Tuesday night and started shooting sporadically, provoking panic among people who ran for safety. Two youths on their way to Rev. Gyang's house to charge their phones were shot by the Fulani; one was killed, the other wounded.

Kim also learned that Rev. Gyang, who lived on his church premises, locked himself with his three children in their room during the attack. Jummai Gyang also locked herself into a toilet. But eventually the assailants attacked the pastorium. They shot Jummai and set fire to the room where her family was hiding.

Eldest son, Adamu, 27, a third-year student at University of Jos, survived: "I was in school when I saw a post on Facebook about the attack ... I called my father; his phone was switched off. I called my mother but her phone was switched off as well."

Adamu managed to speak to someone else, who told him about his parents and three brothers:

"I could not sleep that night."

Early next morning, Adamu got to the village: he was "devastated" when he saw his mother's body and the remains of his father and three brothers burnt beyond recognition.

"My father had always been the strength of our family. Right now, I don't know how my life will be without him."

Rotshak Linus Kamki, who visited hours after the attacks, also told World Watch Monitor: "On Tuesday around 8 to 9 p.m., I received a call telling me that Fulani were attacking Abonong. The next morning, I and two others from the village set out. On arrival, we saw people mourning and discussing what to do with 12 corpses already found.

"As we were still gathering the bodies, some youths were sent to mount vigilance in the bush. Not long after they left, one group came running from the hills, saying they saw Fulani coming. All of a sudden, it was true.

"Before we could do anything, the Fulani started shooting. We didn't know what to do. We were face to face with them as they came to attack us with weapons, while some were still on the hills. We were helpless."

An eyewitness says angry village youths took to the streets in protest at the attacks. Security forces who only arrived that afternoon shot at them, killing six and wounding several others.

Further details from various sources, including Christian Solidarity Worldwide, revealed that the military, who arrived after the perpetrators had gone, reportedly shot and killed a woman who tried to stop them detaining the local youths, asking them to go after the Fulani militias instead.

In a video circulating online*, as a crowd holds up her body, a visibly distressed clergyman, Rev. Ezekiel Dachomo, appeals for assistance from the U.S., British parliamentarians and the U.N.

"America, please stand for us. We are dying ... Please, allow us to survive. We have nobody. Only God in heaven can stand for us. Please, I am begging you. United Nations, your silence is

getting worse. ...Please, please, I'm begging you stand for the helpless. ...Yesterday, one of my colleagues, the reverend was slaughtered with his wife and his children, and I was right there ... look at the women, immediately they were commiserating, after the Fulani herdsmen have filled boarded-down two villages.

"Then the soldiers came in, trying to cause confusion. And who are these army men that are using machine-motorcycles? And then they get to shoot, and they would go, who would stand for us?

"There is nobody. Everybody ... we are now ready to do [our] last prayers since an Islamic agenda is taking over the nation.

"Now, we're live at the police station in Barkin Ladi ... Look at those IDPs. We have nobody to stand, we are the survivors, now war IDPs have been added. Where do they want them to go?

"They have already [been] assigned our lands, have been relocated to them, they have [been] assigned, our villages have been relocated to Fulani herdsmen, and nobody is talking. Even my colleague reverends are keeping quiet.

"Women are dying every day, men are dying. What do you want us to do? Please, please, I am begging you, congressmen, [men] of I am begging you, stand for the helpless. There is nobody [else]...!"

WWM also learned that on Aug. 31, Fulani herdsmen with over 200 cattle invaded the Rakung community in Barkin Ladi LGA, and destroyed maize farms belonging to James Pam, Filibus Choji, Bulus Gyang Shut, Yusufu Boyi and Iliya Bature. Security forces, who eventually intervened, seized over 150 cows from the Fulani.

Following an investigation, the herdsmen agreed to pay 400,000 Naira (about \$1,100) compensation to the farmers to get their

cows back.

Rev. Dachollom Chumang Datiri, president of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), condemned the 'unacceptable' killing of the pastor, "an innocent man of God, whose focus was to preach salvation of souls. ...There is no crisis in Plateau; rather people are attacked in their homes and killed. The government's first responsibility is to provide security to its people. Go to Abonong and see the crops growing there, yet people were attacked and killed. The attackers cannot say they have issues with these innocent people. And even if they do have issues, it is not with the reverend who preaches to turn away from evil practices who is now killed alongside his family."

The violence is often described as communal clashes between predominantly Christian farmers and Fulani herdsmen, mainly Muslims; President Buhari refers to the struggle for natural resources such as water and fertile land.

However, many Christian leaders in the area argue there is a religious dimension, and without acknowledging that, politicians will not be able to properly address the conflict. On Aug. 28, 100 miles away from the attacks, in Jos, a Peace Summit was ending, organized by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for the Northern Regions.

It was attended by top officials, including the secretary to the government of the generation (SGF) and Governor Lalong, along with church, women and youth leaders from the 19 States of Northern Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja).

"Sustainable Peace and Security in Northern Nigeria as Panacea for Development: The Role of Religious Leaders" aimed to bring lasting solutions to violence which has, in the last few months, amplified the growing wave of insecurity in Central and Northern Nigeria, particularly in Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa states.

*WWM has itself verified this video by checking the identity of the speaker.

{eo}

This article originally appeared on World Watch Monitor.