

Nigeria's Persecuted Christians Are Begging Us for Help

Nigeria is like a second home to me. I've been there 10 times.

I've feasted on goat and jollof rice in Port Harcourt, danced for hours with Christians in Akure and Abuja, and joked with friends about the horrible traffic jams in Lagos. My Nigerian brothers and sisters are some of the most passionate believers on planet Earth.

Yet today their faith is under severe attack, and the world doesn't seem to care.

So many Christians have been killed in recent months in northern Nigeria that international humanitarian groups have labeled the situation a genocide. But you will rarely hear anything about this on Western news broadcasts.

More than 1,000 Nigerian Christians were killed in 2019 by Muslim extremists from the Fulani tribe, according to the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust. The group estimates that there have been 6,000 Christians killed since 2015 and up to 12,000 displaced from their homes. The atrocities happened mainly in Plateau, Kaduna and Taraba states in the north.

"Most Christians in Nigeria think there is a plot to Islamacize Nigeria," says my friend Kelechi Okengwu, who studied at the University of Bradford in England and now serves churches in eastern Nigeria and lectures on security issues. He says Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari, who is Muslim, has entrusted all security forces into the hands of northern Muslims. And Buhari is doing little to respond to the violence.

In addition, Okengwu says, the chief justice of Nigeria, Ibrahim Muhammad, in December called for an amendment to the constitution to accommodate sharia law—a step that violates basic principles of a secular state.

Recent attacks by the Fulani herdsmen, as well as violent kidnappings and church-burnings by Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist group, have made Nigeria one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a Christian. According to Open Doors, Nigeria has the 12th-worst persecution of Christians on the planet. Christians have been shot as well as burned to death.

In a video made in 2018, a pastor named Ezekiel Dachomo, from the Church of Christ in Nigeria, issued an urgent plea that has been widely ignored, even though the video was verified and is still circulating. Dachomo begged for international help after a pastor and his wife and children were slaughtered by the Fulanis. He said, in part: “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. ... We are now ready to do [our] last prayers, since an Islamic agenda is taking over the nation.”

Last week, I interviewed Rev. Tunde Bolanta, a Pentecostal pastor who planted Restoration Bible Church in Kaduna, Nigeria, in 1987. He is begging Western believers to pray for the dire situation.

Here are portions of that interview.

1. Muslims have been persecuting Christians in the north of Nigeria for many years. Is it getting more intense now?

Rev. Bolanta: “Persecution is more intense because both Boko Haram terrorists and Fulani herdsmen are invading villages. Churches have been burned, Christians have been killed, women have been raped, farmlands have been burned and many Christians have been displaced from their ancestral homes. The kidnapping of pastors and Christians has become a business.

The attackers demand huge ransoms, thereby draining resources from the Christian community. Some victims have even been killed after the ransom was paid.”

2. Do you personally know Christians who have been killed or kidnapped by Boko Haram?

Rev. Bolanta: “We hear stories of killings and kidnappings of Christians on a daily basis. Pastor Isaac Inua in Adamawa state was shot five times and killed in front of his wife by Boko Haram gunmen. Recently, an 8-year-old girl named Hannah was kidnapped when Fulani herdsman broke into her house at Juji village near Kaduna. Many Christians prayed for her release. After 12 days, she was released after a ransom was paid. Some are not so lucky.”

3. What is the mood of Christians in northern Nigeria?

Rev. Bolanta: “Christians in the north feel abandoned. They are scared. Many are moving away. They feel abandoned by the Western world.”

4. How do Nigerian Christians view President Trump and the political situation in the United States?

Rev. Bolanta: “Many Christians in Nigeria prayed for President Trump to win in 2016 because they see him as a leader who believes in biblical values. President Trump is viewed as a courageous and fearless leader who lives by conviction. Many Christians in Nigeria are praying that he will not be impeached because they see him as a man sent by God to help them.”

5. How can Christians in the West pray for Nigeria?

Rev. Bolanta: “Pray that our faith would not fail. Pray that help will come to counter the terrorists. Pray for provision, since many can no longer farm because their villages or their farmlands have been occupied by invaders. Pray that God will

comfort all those who mourn in Zion. Many are mourning the loss of loved ones and family.”

This violence continues in 2020. In early January, Pastor Lawan Andimi, a leader of the Christian Association of Nigeria, was kidnapped by Boko Haram forces near Nigeria’s border with Cameroon. In a video that surfaced a few days later, he calmly says his captors are treating him respectfully.

“By the grace of God, I will be together with my wife, children and colleagues,” Andimi says in his taped message. “And if the opportunity has not been granted, then maybe it is the will of God.” So far, no one had heard any news about the pastor’s whereabouts—and local Christians are urging believers worldwide to pray for him. {eoa}