



SHORT VERSION

Nigeria: Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” (2014 – 2016)

(with update: 1 January – 31 August 2017)

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Introduction and objectives

The activities of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen started surreptitiously in Benue State over two decades ago. Successive governments have largely neglected both the conflict and its victims. The data collected in this report by Africa Conflict and Security Analysis Network (ACSAN) clearly points to Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen as being responsible for most of the attacks against Christian communities in Benue State in the period from 1 January 2014 through to 31 August 2017.

The main objectives of the report are:

- To examine the historical background to the violence caused by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen against indigenous Christian farmers in Benue State.
- To provide data on the killings and destruction of property (including churches destroyed), carried out by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.
- To provide data on the gender aspect of the conflict - such as the abuse of children and rape of women - and to examine how the perpetrators justify these acts.
- To undertake an analysis of the violent conflict in Benue State, examining the religious reasons for the conflict.

Historical background and use of the term “herdsmen terrorism”

The term “herdsmen terrorism” is linked to how herdsmen use terror to fulfil the religious obligation of *jihad* and to protect their way of life. In 2011 there was a resurgence of Islamic invasion and occupation of local communities, farmlands and territories belonging to Christians in central and southern Nigeria. Thousands of churches have since been destroyed and thousands of Christians have been killed, displaced or injured. Like conventional terrorist organisations and jihadi groups, the ideology of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen goes beyond the mere feeding of sheep and the search for greener pastures. It is inevitably linked to the program of *Dawah* (the propagation and expansion of Islam).

The historical background to this infiltration by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen and to the nature of the violence in Benue can be found in the period 1804 -1856. Uthman dan Fodio (1754 – 1817) waged a *jihad* war and conquered the former Hausa states and the entire northern bank of the River Benue, taking these areas from the hitherto animist Nupe, Nassarawa, Bauchi and Zaria territories. These included the non-Muslim areas of southern Nigeria and the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The early British occupation of the then Benue region in 1900 up until the 1950s witnessed the appointment of many Hausa-Fulani Muslims in the region by the colonial government, brought in from the far north, to act as tax collectors, judges, policemen, scribes and messengers. This not only led to the exploitation of indigenous communities by Hausa-Fulani Muslim colonial agents in Benue, but also demonstrated the abuse of power and privilege by the Muslim controlled government of northern Nigeria before independence in 1960.

Benue State was created as an administrative unit on 3 February 1976. It was one of the seven states created by the military administration of late General Murtala Mohammed, which increased the number of states in the country from 13 to 19. Today, Benue State is made up of a total of 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs). 14 of these LGAs experienced attacks in the years 2014-2016 by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.¹

Details of attacks by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen

Preliminary investigations by Africa Conflict and Security Analysis Network (ACSAN) showed that - in the period January-March 2014 alone - a total of 853 people lost their lives through attacks carried out in a large number of states in the Middle Belt region. Since then, many more Christians have lost their lives, properties and places of worship. The most common weapons used in attacks appear to be handguns and machetes, but according to some military sources, some Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen use Hilux Jeeps and motorcycles to carry out their attacks, together with AK-47 assault rifles and Molotov cocktails. In Gwer West LGA, reports indicate that the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen normally disguise themselves in military uniforms during the attacks and change back into their traditional clothes afterwards. The victims of such attacks in Benue State include students, politicians, farmers, women, children and the elderly. According to eyewitnesses, when Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen arrive in a village, they set houses ablaze, shoot sporadically in the air and kill anyone and anything that moves. Some of the tactics used by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen to instil fear include abduction, rape and other forms of assault on women and children.

In the 14 LGAs attacked in Benue State in the period 2014-2016:

- 4194 Christians were recorded killed and 2957 injured.²
- 30 churches were damaged or destroyed.³
- 195,576 Christian homes were damaged or destroyed.⁴

¹ Nigeria: Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism”, WWR, p.10, available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Nigeria-Benue-State-2017-WWR.pdf>.

² p.23.

³ P.24.

⁴ Id.

- In six of the 14 LGAs attacked, a total of 23,148 Christians became officially internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁵

In the update for January – August 2017, the following attacks and number of Christians killed were recorded:

Date in 2017	Village	LGA	Description of incident	Men killed	Women killed	Children killed	Total no. killed
24 January	Ipiga	Ohimini	Fulani herdsmen attack	20	8	0	28
2 March	Mbahimin	Gwer West	Fulani herdsmen attack	8	1	1	10
11 March	Mkgovur	Buruku	Fulani herdsmen attack	7	0	0	7
12 March	Mkgovur	Buruku	Fulani herdsmen attack farmlands	7	3	0	10
12-20 March	Mkgovur	Buruku	Various attacks by Fulani herdsmen on village	35	10	5	50
28 March	Jato-Aka	Kwande	Fulani herdsmen attack prison farm, killing Tersoo Agidi	1	0	0	1
4 April	Ikyoawen, Moor, Alaba and Nzaav villages	Kwande	Sporadic attacks by Fulani herdsmen	8	2	0	10
21 April	Tse-Igba Uke	Gwer West	Fulani herdsmen attack	3	0	0	3
8 May	Tse-Akaa, Tse-Orlalu, Ugondo Mbamar District	Logo	Fulani herdsmen attack	6	2	2	10
16 June	North Bank	Makurdi	Fulani herdsmen attack rice farmers	5	2	0	7
10 August	Akpagodogbo	Otukpo	Fulani herdsmen attacks	3	0	0	3
TOTAL KILLED				103	28	8	139

Focus on gender-based abuse of Christians

During political violence and armed conflict, boys and girls suffer varying degrees of sexual abuse. The situation in Benue State is no exception to this unfortunate development. In the long version of the WWR Benue report Tables 6–9 list a number of incidents where Christian women and/or children were kidnapped, raped, sexually abused or assaulted by Hausa Fulani Muslim herdsmen in Benue State in the period 1 January 2014 – 30 September 2016. The details listed

⁵ p.30.

in the report are all based on ASCAN interviews with victims, community leaders, church leaders, as well as leaders of local vigilante groups in the affected areas. The lists are not exhaustive, especially since some victims were unwilling to speak of their experience due to the stigma associated with rape.

Table 6 in the long version of the report lists fourteen examples of gender-based abuse (GBA) through abduction in Benue State over the period January 2014 – September 2016. Below is a selection:

Date of GBA	Place	Category	Description
24/04/2015	Gbise, Katsina-Ala LGA	3 Christian women abducted	These women were abducted after an attack on the village that claimed many lives. The attack took place in the early hours when the women had gone to the stream to fetch water for house chores. They were abducted from near-by bush where the women had been hiding from the attackers.
07/10/2015	Abako, Katsina-Ala LGA	1 Christian women abducted	She was ambushed and abducted while coming from the farm, where she went in the morning to collect yams for the family's meal.
12/01/2016	Tse- Nule, Guma LGA	1 Christian women abducted	This woman was abducted after her home was raided in the night. Her husband was killed.
29/11/2015	Tse- Jonyi, Guma LGA	1 Christian women abducted	The village of Jonyi was attacked by suspected Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. During the attack, a woman was abducted from where she was taking cover in nearby bushes.
30/02/2016	Shaorga, Makurdi LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was kidnapped while returning from a neighbouring village market.
21/08/2016	Mbaayo, Tarka LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was abducted after her home was raided in the night. Her husband was killed.

Table 7 in the long version of the report lists seven examples of gender-based abuse (GBA) of Christian women through rape in Benue State over the period January 2014 – September 2016. Below is a selection:

Date of GBA	Place	Status of the victim	Description
25/05/2015	Asuku, Katsina-Ala LGA	Married	This woman was forcefully taken and abused after an attack on the village where she lives and farms. 5 herdsmen raped her in one day.
07/12/2015	Bam, Guma LGA	Widow	This woman was gang raped when the herdsmen stopped her fetching water in the evening.
16/01/2016	Pakema, Guma LGA	Married	This woman was abused by herdsmen who lay in ambush on a market road.
12/07/2016	Olegadekele, Agatu LGA	Widow	Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen abused this woman sexually after inflicting her with injuries and cuts.

Table 8 in the long version of the report lists 21 examples of gender-based abuse (GBA) of Christian women through physical torture in Benue State over the period January 2014 – September 2016. Below is a selection:

Date of GBA	Place	Status of victim	Description
30/04/2015	Aganyi, Gwer-West LGA	Widow	This woman was forcefully taken and kept in the bush by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen for 3 days during which she was flogged with 21 strokes of the cane 3 times daily.
04/09/2015	Mbalom, Gwest East LGA	Married	This woman was tied to a tree in the bush and abandoned there for 2 days without food. She was eventually rescued by local hunters.
18/02/2016	Alegoga, Agatu LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
16/05/2015	Genyi, Logo LGA	Widow	This woman was tied in the bush facing downwards and left. She would have spent days in that position if the community's local vigilante group had not heard her cries in the night and come to the rescue.
19/ 10/2015	Enogaje, Agatu LGA	Widow	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.
11/04/2015	Engila, Agatu LGA	Widow	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
23/12/2015	Ojntele, Agatu LGA	Widow	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
08/11/2015	Ehungba, Agatu LGA	Married	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.

Table 9 in the long version of the report lists nine examples of gender-based abuse (GBA) of Christian children in Benue State over the period January 2014 – September 2016. The table is shown below:

Date of GBA	Place	Category	Description
22/08/2015	Bino village, Guma LGA	Rape	A 13 year old girl was gang-raped and abandoned in the bush for hours before local vigilante group came to her rescue. (She is still traumatized.)
24/02/2016	Gum, Guma LGA	Torture	A 10 year old boy, simply identified as Terna, is reported to have been whipped severely with different sizes of cane and was abandoned in a shallow pit, where he was discovered and rushed to a private clinic in the North-Bank axis of Makurdi, the Benue State capital.

29/03/2015	Vaase, Ukum LGA	Abduction and rape	A 14 year old girl was kidnapped after an attack and was taken to the Sev-Av axis of neighboring Taraba State where she was raped and abandoned. She was discovered in the bush and returned to her family.
09/05/2015	Mbakyyaa, Tarka LGA	Torture and rape	A 14 year old girl, simply identified as Kpadoo, is reported to have been tortured and gang-raped when she was returning from the stream where she went to fetch water.
02/02/2015	Dusa, Logo LGA	Abduction and torture	A 12 year old boy was abducted during an attack on Dusa and was taken to Uzer axis of Logo LGA where he underwent different categories of torture, ranging from psychological to physical.
17/07/2015	Ukpe, Gwer-West LGA	Torture	A 13 year old boy was captured and tortured. The herdsmen captured him while returning from Idum village which they had attacked earlier.
30/04/2015	Agoo, Katsina-Ala LGA	Rape	An 11 year old girl was gang-raped and sustained severe injuries. Medical attention was required to save her life.
01/03/2016	Obishu, Agatu LGA	Rape	A 13 year old girl, simply identified as Ada, was raped and abandoned in the bush. Her cries attracted attention and led to her rescue. (She is still traumatized.)
20/05/2015	Okadu, Agatu LGA	Torture	A 10 year old boy was tortured and tied in the bush where he died. The signs on his corpse showed clearly that he had been whipped repeatedly.

Conclusion

As adduced by some experts, the reasons accounting for the violent conflict in Benue State include the innate aggressive nature of the people and the socio-political contestation for economic and political power. While not totally dismissing these factors, data gathered in the course of this report strongly suggests that the violent conflict in Benue State is religiously motivated and is indeed a planned persecution of Christians by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. The authors of this report are of the opinion that the data gathered gives clear indications of ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliation.

The Anti-Open Grazing and Establishment of Ranches Bill passed into Benue State law in May 2017. If implemented successfully, there are hopes that this could be a viable way out of the current crisis and a model for other states, since the traditional way of grazing is clearly no longer sustainable. However, on 23 October 2017, the National President and Secretary of the Fulani socio-cultural association “Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore” called a press conference in Abuja, insisting that the convergence of herdsmen in the Benue valley between November and February every year is historical and inevitable. They claimed that the Anti-Open Grazing Law signed by Benue State Governor in May 2017 (and due to be implemented in November 2017) denied the herdsmen their legitimate rights as Nigerians. The association called on President Muhammad Buhari to stop the law, otherwise the herdsmen would have to defend their rights and their lifestyle. The uncertainty following this press conference has raised security concerns among local communities in Benue State. The current atmosphere suggests that the indications

of ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliation are likely to become increasingly evident through further attacks targeting Christian communities.