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NIGERIA: FULANI ATTACKS, AI CLAIMS OF GOVERNMENT COMPLICITY AND CHRISTIAN AGGRESSION

Summary:

A report by Amnesty International in January 2018 blames the government of complicity in the death and destruction in Adamawa in December 2017 and accuses Christians of attacking Fulani.

An Amnesty International (AI) report published 30 January 2018 [implicated](#) the Nigerian government in the bombing of Christian communities in Adamawa State.¹ According to the report, the Nigeria Air Force deployed an Alpha Jet and EC 135 attack helicopter to respond to an attack on villages in Demsa and Numan LGA by armed herdsmen on 4 December 2017. The air raids occurred as hundreds of herdsmen attacked eight villages in Adamawa state. On 29 November, amid fears of a reprisal attacks by herdsmen, police announced they would deploy 315 extra officers in the area.

Witnesses from Lawaru, Dong, Kodomti, Shafaron and Nzuruwei villages, described to AI being attacked by a fighter jet and a military helicopter as they attempted to flee. In some villages, the air attacks happened at the same time as the raids, while in other villages the air force arrived shortly afterwards. AI visited five villages and learned that some 3,000 homes were destroyed. As the herdsmen shot people and torched homes, and the air raid resulted in fire, it was not possible to establish how much of the death and destruction was a direct result of the air attacks or attributable to the attack by herdsmen.

As it was pointed out in the article by World Watch Monitor (WWM) on 2 February 2018, these communities are [mostly Christian](#).² WWM included in their report quotes from Christian witnesses on the ground. Although the government confirmed the deployment of the fighter jet, they are yet to acknowledge responsibility for the death and destruction AI accused them of.

Open Doors (OD) have been unable to independently confirm the veracity of the report, but have heard similar claims from the area. What can be confirmed is that this situation is completely out of control. The increase in number of attacks over the past few years and the accompanying brutality is deeply troubling. It is hard to keep up with every single attack, but AI indicated, that at least 168 people were killed in January alone. It is very hard to confirm that number, as official death tolls are notoriously untrustworthy in Nigeria. But in January alone, it can be confirmed that there were 13 attacks on Christian villages in Kaduna, Benue, Adamawa, Platea, Taraba, Katsina and Nasarawa States.

¹ See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7795/2018/en/>.

² See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/nigerian-air-force-complicit-in-massacre-of-christian-villagers-says-amnesty/>.

Open Doors contacts are not in a position to confirm claims reported in the AI report that those particular December Fulani attacks came in response to Christians killing 51 Fulani people (including women and children). OD condemns in the strongest terms any aggression from Christians if not out of self-defense. Over the many years that Christians have faced targeted violence, OD has helped church leaders offer biblical answers to their members who consider revenge. However, although OD cannot say that Christians are never in the wrong, they generally perpetrate violence far less regularly than the Fulani. Far fewer Fulani have died in Christian attacks than the other way around. See, for instance the diagram relating to attacks in Benue on page 21 of World Watch Research's 2015 report on [Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies](#).³

Open Doors also believes that media incorrectly use the term "clashes" when referring to attacks. The herders often strike defenseless communities at night. Additionally, Christian sources point out that while Fulani herders go around with (often very sophisticated) weapons, Christians are not allowed to arm themselves at all - not even for self-protection. These Christian communities question how it is possible for the herders to possess such sophisticated weapons unless it had been supplied by outside parties.

Christians have also expressed frustration with the government for their handling of this issue. They accuse the government of a completely imbalanced response towards the Christian and Muslim victims. For example, Christian witnesses have also often told OD following attacks that security forces have either withdrawn completely prior to attacks or arrived too late to offer any protection. Also, the government recently gave the Divisional Police Officer of Tiv in Benue State just seven days to find those who killed six Fulani herders, but killings of Christians have been going on for months in the same state with no one being brought to book.

Open Doors has been working hard to bring greater awareness about the Fulani attacks, as well as a deeper understanding of the religious aspect to the conflict which so few stakeholders are willing to acknowledge. OD welcomes all efforts by WWM, Amnesty International, the International Crisis Centre and the Africa Centre to cast light on the suffering of people in this regard. In particular OD welcomes every effort by the [Christian Association of Nigeria \(CAN\)](#)⁴ to remain engaged with their government about this issue despite the government's continued denial of the religious nature of the attacks and urge them to continue to be a trustworthy source of information and commentary on the matter.

Useful links

- Video: <https://vimeo.com/224175763> (password SDGSDG) about the Fulani crisis.
- [Interview with Yusufu Turaki](#), Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion, Church and Society at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary.

³ See: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Migration-and-Violent-Conflict-in-Divided-Societies-March-2015.pdf> (password: freedom).

⁴ See: <http://dailypost.ng/2018/01/16/fulani-herdsmen-can-breaks-silence-killings-nigeria-blasts-buhari/>.