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## NIGERIA: KEBBI CHRISTIANS FACE BLATANT PRESSURE TO DENY CHRIST

### Summary:

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You won't find the village of Danbango in the Yauri local government area of Kebbi State on Google Maps because it is so remote. There aren't any roads leading directly to it. Anyone who wants to go there must know exactly where it is located. When driving there, you must leave the main road at some point and follow narrow footpaths in the town's general direction and hope for the best.

Until recently, almost all people living there were Animists. But in 2012 missionaries went to Yauri to preach the gospel. Many refused the message, but in the village of Danbango a few people heeded the call to repentance and left their idols to follow Christ.

Danbango is a farming community and they have never regarded literacy as essential to their vocation, so discipling them has been a challenge. Almost no one can read the Bible for themselves. But a few pastors have persisted despite the difficulties and have, with the help of the Holy Spirit, shaped a community of believers who are showing remarkable strength in resisting pressure to deny Christ.

Not long ago Muslim preachers visited communities in the area to urge them to accept Islam and be rewarded handsomely with boreholes, schools and clinics. Many gave in, but the Christians in Danbango would not agree. "We still fetch water from a brook. Sometimes it is very dirty, but we have

no option but to drink it and cook with it. God has been protecting us from different diseases and ailments.”

But there was an even greater cost to this resolve. One Christian told us, “When my son became very sick, I took him to hospital, but the doctors said they would treat him only if I denounced Christ. I refused and took him home. Some days later he died. I blamed myself for causing his death but later remembered that the Scriptures say he is not dead but asleep. We will meet again at the Lord’s feet one day and that comforts me.”

In April this year, the pressure escalated to prosecution. Joshua Wede, pastor of the church, explains, “The district head of Yauri accompanied by a Muslim vigilante group came to our church and disrupted the worship service. They beat us and claimed that the land our church was built on wasn’t approved by the government. But it belongs to one of our church members who gave it to us to build a place for our services. The mosque close by was not pulled down despite the fact that they didn’t get additional approval to build on the land either.

“On May 11th we were arrested and taken to prison where we were beaten again and given hard labor. We had no opportunity to contact a lawyer, and some officials told us if we pleaded guilty we would be set free. We didn’t have anyone to speak to or anyone who could stand for us, so we agreed. Some representatives from CAN came to court to plead that the hearing be postponed so that they could talk with us, but it was too late. We had already pleaded guilty. The final judgement was passed on May 18th and we were sentenced to three years imprisonment with hard labor or a fine of \$150 each.” Open Doors staff travelled to Kebbi to attend the final hearing and paid the fines the Christians received. Sadly, this is not an isolated case. Pastor Kabiru, who also cares for a small group of believers in the area, told us. “I have been arrested many times (on false accusations) and have been imprisoned three times. It is all just an effort to frustrate evangelism.”

In February 2016 the government confiscated 32 farms from which 45 Christian families made a living. This was land they inherited from their forefathers and they tried to raise money to take the matter to court. They gathered and sold wood and worked on other people’s farms. But they could not raise enough funds and had to give it up. Open Doors staff travelled to Danbango to see the situation and were shocked to see that many believers had run out of food. They were able to return shortly after with some relief aid to assist at least the most desperate families for a few months.

### **More on Kebbi**

Danbango is one of 21 local government areas (LGA) in Kebbi State in the northwestern corner of Nigeria. The state was created on 27 August 1991 and came under sharia rule in December 2000. Although it is sometimes referred to as the land of equity, Christians who make up a quarter of the population here are treated as second class citizens. Examples of the discrimination they face include:

- When the state came into existence the First Baptist Church, Christ Apostolic Church and Redemption Chapel were relocated from the heart of the city close to government house, to the outskirts of the city. The presidential lodge was built where these churches used to stand.

- In the capital, Birnin Kebbi, all churches, with the exception of the St Luke's Anglican Church and ECWA Hausa church, are located on the outskirts, all clustered together in one place.
- Congregations in general find it hard to get permission to build churches. This has been the case with at least two others, one in Mayepo village and one in Kagavi village.
- While most school compounds contain mosques, there is not a single church in government school compounds. Christian students meet in classrooms for fellowship.
- While Islamic religious knowledge is taught in government schools, Christian religious knowledge is not.
- Christian programs are hardly ever aired on state television or radio stations.
- Job opportunities and admissions are mainly given to non-Christians. In offices Christians are not duly promoted or paid equal salaries. In cases where they do get promoted, these promotions are often not implemented.
- There is no Christian cemetery in Birnin Kebbi. Deceased Christians have to be taken to Jega LGA to be buried.
- Since its creation, only one Christian from this state has ever made it to cabinet.