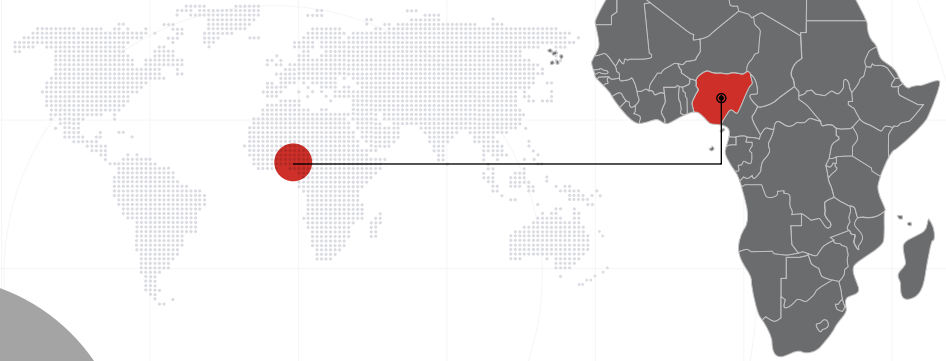
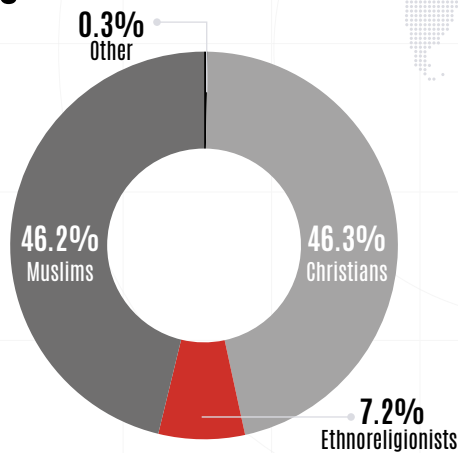




# NIGERIA

## RELIGIONS



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country with a population of around 200 million, is a federal republic with a democratic system of government that guarantees religious freedom. In addition to its 36 states, the country also has a Federal Capital Territory in which the capital, Abuja, is located. Under Article 15 of the Nigerian Constitution, no person may be discriminated against on grounds of his or her religious affiliation.<sup>1</sup> Article 10 stipulates that neither Nigeria as a Federal Republic, nor any of its individual states, may adopt a state religion.

Beyond this, Article 38 (I) of the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of thought and religion, including the right to freely practise one’s faith, propagate it through religious instruction, and convert to another faith. Article 38 (II) says that no one may be compelled to participate in religious instruction against his or her will if the instruction is not in accordance with that person’s faith. This guarantee also extends to religious observances.

In the effort to promote social inclusion, Article 15 (3, c and

d) of the Constitution places the state under an obligation to foster inter-religious marriages and to promote the establishment of associations and groups for members of different religions. Article 222 (e) also prohibits political parties from identifying with any particular religion or region.

Nigeria has a mixed legal system with four separate sources, namely English law, common law, customary law, and, in a number of states, Islamic law (Shari’a).<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to Article 275 of the Nigerian Constitution, states are entitled to empanel a Shari’a Court of Appeal.

When 12 states officially introduced Islamic law more than 20 years ago, many Muslims reacted with enthusiasm while Christians protested the decision. There were riots that claimed several thousand lives - Christians as well as Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

According to Fr. Atta Barkindo, director of the renown Catholic Kukah Centre promoting interfaith dialogue<sup>4</sup>, after 20 years of Shari’a, the situation in northern Nigeria where it has been implemented has become worse.<sup>5</sup> Ethnicity and religion have effectively become a means to obtain power, resources and privileges. Fr. Barkindo states: “What Sharia law has done is to divide us more

in this country. You go to communities; people have withdrawn into the womb of their religions".<sup>6</sup> According to Fr. Barkindo it is urgent for Nigerians to discuss what their country should actually look like as a secular state, how it can define itself as a nation, and how Christians and Muslims can live together.<sup>7</sup>

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

With 55.6 percent of the votes, Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim and former army general was re-elected to another four-year term following the presidential election of the 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> February 2019.<sup>8</sup>

His government confronted a variety of problems during the reporting period including: Islamist terror, the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread poverty, omnipresent corruption and police brutality, most notably by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which was the target of massive public demonstrations in 2020.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to a famine experienced by the poorest segments of society exacerbated by the COVID-19 virus, the population suffered increasingly brutal terrorist attacks, both in the majority Muslim north of the country where the extremist Islamist militant group Boko Haram operates<sup>10</sup> as well as by Fulani (herder) militants in the central states. Calls for a ceasefire by Nigeria's Catholic bishops, Pope Francis and the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres during the pandemic have gone unheeded.<sup>11</sup>

Serious human rights violations have been reported with women and children often the victims. In June 2020, the Archbishop of Abuja, Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, deplored increasing sexual violence against women in Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> The increase in cases of rape against women and attacks by the SARS have led to massive protests in some regions of the country. On social media, urgent measures and demands for justice have appeared on behalf of the victims under the hashtags #WeAreTired and #EndSARS.<sup>13</sup>

During the period under review, Nigeria remained one of the worst places in the world for the persecution of Christians and Muslims by Islamist terrorists. According to the UN, an estimated 36,000 people have died and two million have been displaced as a result of two decades of Boko Haram violence alone.<sup>14</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that half of the approximately 40,000

people reported missing in Africa to date come from the north-eastern region of Nigeria, the scene of attacks and kidnappings by Boko Haram.<sup>15</sup>

The Boko Haram violence, in an effort to overthrow the government and establish an Islamic state<sup>16</sup>, targets government personnel and facilities including military and police, as well as churches and schools (translation of Boko Haram is generally understood to mean "western education is forbidden")<sup>17</sup>, Muslim critics<sup>18</sup>, as well as arbitrary attacks on civilians in village markets. More recently the group has engaged in the kidnapping of school children.

Muslims have suffered a great burden of the horrific violence at the hands of the extremists, not least because the insurgency occurs in a predominantly Muslim part of the country, but also due to the ideological influences that underpin Boko Haram's fundamentalist approach to Islam. Tony Blair Institute analyst for Extremism Policy, Audu Bulama Bukarti, states that, "as many as 44 of the 46 so-called 'scholars' who influence Boko Haram are Saudi. Just two are indigenous to Nigeria".<sup>19</sup> These scholars, according to Bukarti, follow "anachronistic texts, which sought to weed out weak or pretend believers according to an extreme reading of the Qur'an developed during the Mongol invasions of Mesopotamia in the 14th century".<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding this, starting in 2011 and 2012, Christians have increasingly become the victims of a strategic, targeted attack.<sup>21</sup> In 2019, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) stated, "the widespread killing in Nigeria's north has predominately targeted Christians, who make up 95 percent of those currently detained by jihadists".<sup>22</sup>

Concerns to the impact of terror by Boko Haram, however, were overshadowed in 2019 by an upsurge in violence by Fulani militants. The Global Terrorist Index 2019<sup>23</sup> indicated that in 2018 alone, "Fulani extremists were responsible for the majority of terror-related deaths in Nigeria (1,158 fatalities)".<sup>24</sup> This dark trend continued throughout the reporting period.

The Muslim community contains two of the country's largest ethnic groups, Hausa and Fulani. The Fulani, numbering approximately 7 million in Nigeria, are a semi-nomadic group herding cattle over vast regions in the central states. The antagonism between Fulani (mainly Muslim)

herdsmen and farmers (mainly Christian) is historical. As the Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium states: “Fulani herders and farmers are in constant violent conflict over herdsmen’s increased need for access to grazing lands against the expansion of farmland by farmers into corridors traditionally used by the Fulani”.<sup>25</sup> These often degrade into revenge-based clashes. The issue, however, “has been exacerbated in recent times by external factors such as climate change”.<sup>26</sup>

The reality of systematic terror against farmers, as well as police and military, with the use of high-grade weapons orchestrated by a small minority of militant Fulani extremists, however, is recent. So too is the increasingly radical Islamist nature of the attacks. A June 2020 British All Party Parliament Group report stated: “While not necessarily sharing an identical vision, some Fulani herders have adopted a comparable strategy to Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and demonstrated a clear intent to target Christians and symbols of Christian identity such as churches”. The report also noted: “During many of the attacks, herders are reported by survivors to have shouted ‘Allah u Akbar’, ‘destroy the infidels’ and ‘wipe out the infidels’”.<sup>27</sup> Again, however, Muslim farmers have not been spared. In Zamfara State where violence is prevalent, “both herders and farmers are mostly Muslim and mostly Fulani”.<sup>28</sup>

A study to the Fulani militant violence conducted by independent researcher and analyst, Dr. José Luis Bazán, revealed that between 2017 and 2020 “more than 2,539 people were killed, 393 were wounded, 253 kidnapped, 16 raped, more than 7,582 houses burnt and 24 churches destroyed in 654 attacks carried out over the three years”.<sup>29</sup> The cumulative impact on the nation of Boko Haram, Fulani, the Ansaru terror group, as well as that of the ISIS splinter group Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), alongside roving criminal groups - is catastrophic.

In a letter sent to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in early July 2020, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, President of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), expressed solidarity with Nigeria’s Christian communities who are “living a situation of continuous attacks by terrorists, insurgents and militias that in some cases reaches levels of genuine criminal persecution”.<sup>30</sup> Debates in the international community address whether this is, in fact, a genocide.

There are generally three types of closely related violence affecting Christians in particular: attacks on churches, the killing of people, and kidnappings. The list of incidents in each case below is, by very fact of the sheer number of attacks, and often the difficulty in tracking in rural environments, only a representative selection.

#### Attacks on churches

Christian churches and homes in Nigeria are repeatedly targeted by the militant groups.

On 3rd July 2018, Fulani militias on motorcycles set fire to 17 Christian homes, the Baptist Church and vicarage, and a government run hospital in the village of Rahwol-Fwi, central Nigeria.<sup>31</sup> The Christian Association of Nigeria stated: “There is no doubt that the sole purpose of these attacks is aimed at ethnic cleansing, land grabbing and forceful ejection of the Christian natives from their ancestral land and heritage”.<sup>32</sup>

On 23rd March 2019, Fulani militants attacked two villages (Mante and Nida) in Nasarawa State, burning down 28 homes and two Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) buildings, and two belonging to the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC); hundreds of displaced Christians sought refuge in Akwanga town.<sup>33</sup>

On Christmas Eve 2019, Boko Haram jihadists attacked the Christian village of Kwarangulum in Borno State, in the northeast of the country.<sup>34</sup> The town church, along with other buildings, was burnt to the ground. Seven people attempting to flee were shot to death.

On 27th January 2020, 32 people were killed and The Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) church and pastor’s house was burned down in two nights of attacks by Fulani militants in Plateau State.<sup>35</sup> This followed an earlier attack on Christian communities in Marish and Ruboi villages in which Fulani militants killed 17 people, and an attack on Kwatas in which 15 people were killed.<sup>36</sup>

On the evening of 21st February 2020, members of Boko Haram raided a predominantly Christian settlement in Garkida, Adamawa State, killing several people.<sup>37</sup> Three Protestant churches were reported destroyed in the attack. According to the President of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Stephen Panya Baba (Jos), residents of the settlement had warned security forces of an impending attack by radical Islamists, however,

the security forces did nothing to protect the town.<sup>38</sup> The attackers systematically destroyed the homes of Christians.<sup>39</sup>

On 23rd April 2020, Fulani extremists killed two people, kidnapped another and burned down a church including the pastor's home in a predominantly Christian area of north-central Nigeria.<sup>40</sup>

On 15th September 2020, following two attacks on the parish church of St. Peter in Makurdi on 12th August and 13th September, the local bishop, Wilfred Anagbe, ordered the indefinite interruption of all pastoral activities.<sup>41</sup>

### Killing of people

During the period under review, a number of Christian faithful, pastors and Catholic priests were killed.

On 1st January 2018, approximately 50 persons were killed in coordinated attacks on Tom-Atar and Umenge, Akor villages in Guma, Benue State, by suspected Fulani militia. The attacks, which started late New Year's Day, left several injured, destroyed homes and forced thousands of people to flee.<sup>42</sup>

On 6th January 2018, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), issued a statement accusing the Federal Government of complicity in the attacks by Fulani militants by protecting the culprits. CAN president, Reverend Ayokunle Samson said: "We in the Christian Association of Nigeria are forced to make this press release on the continuous inhuman and wicked activities of the Fulani herdsmen all over the federation who are going from community to community killing innocent farmers with impunity".<sup>43</sup>

On 7th January 2018, Fulani militants attacked Tombo village, Benue State, killing 11 persons.<sup>44</sup>

On 25th January 2018, Fulani militants killed five people and injured eight others in an attack on Bassa, Plateau State. 20 houses were also destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

According to a February 2018 report by The Nation, an influx of Tiv residents from Nasarawa State into Benue State occurred following sustained attacks by suspected Fulani militia. Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom said, "there are seven IDPs camps with over 100,000 people there".<sup>46</sup>

On 27th February 2018, 19 farmers including Catholics and Lutherans were killed in an attack by Fulani militia in remote northern Nigeria. The Nigerian army killed a number of militants but not before the Gwamba village in Adamawa state was set ablaze.<sup>47</sup>

In March 2018, 27 were killed in the predominantly Christian community of Dong village north of Jos by Fulani militants.<sup>48</sup>

In mid-March 2018, Fulani militia killed three persons including a catechist, Christopher Umenger, shot on his way to morning Mass, in Guma, Benue State.<sup>49</sup>

In mid-April 2018, suspected Fulani herdsmen in Benue State killed a reported 42 persons.<sup>50</sup>

During the same period, Fulani militants killed two priests - Rev. Fathers Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha - one catechist and 15 worshippers attending morning Mass at St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Ayar-Mbalom, in Benue State. Many of the villagers sustained serious injuries during the attack and nearly 50 houses were burnt. At the memorial Mass, Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor, the Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese, condemned the killings stating: "This senseless killing of the innocent Nigerians are becoming a daily occurrence. Why can't our government put a stop to these killings here and there? Is it not obvious that some people, somewhere are carrying a particular agenda? There is more to this than meets the eye".<sup>51</sup>

On 9th May 2018, suspected Fulani militants killed nine villagers and injured three others of the Tutuwa community in Taraba State, while going for early morning prayers.<sup>52</sup>

On 21st May 2018, the Archdeacon of Eket, Victor Oghotuama, of the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, Delta State, said that the "unabating killings of Christians by the Fulani herdsmen all over the country was part of the Islamic agenda for Nigeria which the present administration has failed to tame".<sup>53</sup>

On 28th May 2018, Fulani militants attacked the Sacred Heart Minor Seminary, Jalingo, shooting Fr. Cornelius Kobah in the leg and beating up Fr. Stephen Bakari.<sup>54</sup>

On 23rd June 2018, Fulani militants attacked 10 villages in the Barkin Ladi area of Plateau State killing 86 mainly Christian farmers.<sup>55</sup>

On 30th June 2018, 238 Christians were killed by Islamist militias in a series of attacks in Plateau State.<sup>56</sup>

On 3rd July 2018, the Nigerian House of Representatives declared the sustained Fulani “herdsmen” attacks in the Plateau State as “genocide”.<sup>57</sup>

In September 2018, Islamic extremists attacked Christian homes and murdered 11 people in the city of Jos, Plateau State.<sup>58</sup>

On 19th September 2018, Fr. Louis Odudu died in a hospital in Warri, Delta State, four days after escaping from his kidnappers.<sup>59</sup>

On 18th October 2018, unidentified Muslims killed “dozens of Christians” in a market and burned a church in Kaduna state, north-central Nigeria.<sup>60</sup>

On 2nd January 2019, Fulani militants killed at least 14 people returning from Churches, and burnt several houses in attacks in Barkin Ladi, Plateau State.<sup>61</sup>

On 20th February 2019, hundreds of Christian women marched on the streets of Jagindi and Godogodo towns to protest the killing of 12 Christians at a wedding reception in a Jagindi suburb on 16th December 2018.<sup>62</sup>

On 1st March 2019, Fulani militants set several buildings on fire including homes and churches killing over 30 Christians in an early morning attack near the town of Maro, Kaduna State.<sup>63</sup>

On 13th March 2019, the governor of Kaduna State, Nasir El-Rufai, imposed a dusk to dawn curfew in Kajuru following the killings of more than 120 people by alleged Fulani militants since February in the state. The attacks displaced thousands and included the destruction of more than 140 homes.<sup>64</sup>

In mid-March 2019, at an Aid to the Church in Need conference, Fr. Joseph Bature Fidelis from the Diocese of Maiduguri in north-east Nigeria stated: “Nigeria today has the highest levels of Islamist terrorist activity in the world”.<sup>65</sup>

On 20th March 2019, the body of Catholic priest Fr. Clement Rapuluchukwu Ugwu of St. Mark’s Church, was found in Obinofia Ndiuno in the Ezeagu Local Government Area, Enugu State. He had been abducted on 13th March.<sup>66</sup> Bishop Callistus Onaga of Enugu expressed frustration

at the police’s inability to free Fr. Ugwu. Despite their assurances that they were on the kidnapper’s trail, the criminals continued withdrawing money from the priest’s account using his ATM card.<sup>67</sup>

In mid-April 2019, 17 persons were killed following an attack by suspected Fulani militia during a naming ceremony in Kochum-Numa village in Akwanga council area.<sup>68</sup>

In early May 2019, at least six persons were killed by suspected Fulani militants in four villages in Andawama.<sup>69</sup>

On 20th May 2019, approximately 20 persons were killed by Fulani militants in an agrarian community in Uzo-Uwani, Enugu State.<sup>70</sup>

On 1st June, 2019, in a memorial Mass, Fr. Cyriacus Kamai decried the killing of 51 Kona locals and the displacement of 8,494 people over the month of May across 11 villages following attacks by alleged Fulani militants.<sup>71</sup>

On 17th June 2019, Fulani militants killed four Christians in Kaduna State, and nine other Christians in neighbouring Plateau state.<sup>72</sup>

In July 2019, the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum stated that Fulani militants were “deliberately committing genocide against the Nigerian people while disguising as cattle breeders”. The Forum stated that according to compilations from international sources, “about 30,000 Nigerians have been killed in the last four years by Fulani herdsmen/militia”.<sup>73</sup>

On 14-15th July 2019, Fulani militants attacked and killed three Christians and burned down 75 houses and two church buildings in the Christian communities of Ancha, Tafigana, Kperie, Hukke and Rikwechongu.<sup>74</sup> Villager Zongo Lawrence stated: “We have been experiencing daily attacks by these Fulani herdsmen in our communities, most especially on Sundays during worship hours or Thursdays when church activities are held”.<sup>75</sup>

In July 2019, an 83-year-old Muslim cleric, Imam Abubakar Abdullahi, was honoured with the 2019 International Religious Freedom Award for hiding 262 Christians fleeing attackers in his home and mosque. US Religious Freedom Ambassador Sam Brownback stated: “The imam gave refuge to his Christian neighbours, sheltering 262 Christians in his mosque and his home... then stood outside the doors confronting the Muslim attackers,

pleading with them to spare the lives of the Christians inside, even offering to exchange his own life for theirs".<sup>76</sup>

On 1st August 2019, Fr. Paul Offu of the Catholic community in Ugbawka, Enugu State, was stopped and shot by Fulani militants.<sup>77</sup> At a public protest, the priests of the Diocese of Enugu called for greater security by state institutions. The Catholic Diocese of Enugu issued a statement on its Facebook page describing the dramatic situation of a region as "marked by massacres, kidnappings, rape, arson and devastation", and also calling into question the responsibilities of the political authorities.<sup>78</sup>

On 29th August 2019, Fr. David Tanko was murdered on his way to Takum, Taraba State, to take part in a meeting brokering an end to conflicts between the Tiv and Jukun communities. The perpetrators, allegedly from a Tiv militia, burnt the priest's body and set his car on fire.<sup>79</sup>

On 25th December 2019, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) shot and beheaded 11 Christians. This followed a Christmas Eve attack by Boko Haram, which left at least 11 dead and a church burned to the ground.<sup>80</sup>

On 26th December 2019, a 56-second propaganda video produced by the ISIS "news agency" Amaq displayed the execution of the 11 Nigerian Christians by ISWAP.<sup>81</sup> The extremist group stated that the killings were to "avenge the death of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi during a raid in Syria in October".<sup>82</sup>

Following the publication of the video, in an interview with the Catholic charity Aid to Church in Need, Catholic Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of the Sokoto Diocese stated that although Muslims were also victims of the violence, the systematic attacks against Nigerian Christians by Fulani militants constituted a genocide.<sup>83</sup>

On 26th December 2019, the UK's Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) released a 2019 report indicating that "over 1000 Christians were killed in Nigeria by Fulani and Boko Haram militants since January".<sup>84</sup>

In early January 2020, Boko Haram kidnapped Protestant pastor and regional leader of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Lawan Andimi, and beheaded him on 20th January because he refused to renounce his Christian faith.<sup>85</sup>

On 20th January 2020, Fr. Augustine Avertse of the St

Augustine Catholic Church in the Keana Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, was murdered.<sup>86</sup> In the morning hours, presumed nomadic Fulani militants, attacked the community of Abebe, firing their weapons. Fr. Augustine Avertse, together with his father, Akaa'am Avertse, and two other people were killed in the shooting. One survivor injured in the attack emphasised that the attack was unprovoked, as there had never been any disputes between the members of the community and the Fulani who lived in the area.<sup>87</sup>

On 1st March 2020, hundreds of demonstrators, led by Catholic bishops, rallied in the capital city of Abuja for a peaceful protest against the widespread violence and the persecution of Christians in the country.<sup>88</sup> President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, Archbishop Augustine Akubueze of Benin City, stated: "We protest against the brutal killings of innocent Nigerians by Boko Haram and groups of armed herdsman who violently invade the lands of agricultural populations".<sup>89</sup> Archbishop Akubueze added: "The killing of the children of God is evil, the inability to protect innocent people from incessant attacks is evil, not pursuing terrorists is an evil thing, our government's response to the terrorist attack is, using an understatement, very below average".<sup>90</sup>

On 16th March 2020, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety) released a report indicating that at least 70 Catholic priests, seminarians and religious have been abducted or murdered in Nigeria since June 2015.<sup>91</sup> "Available statistics show that between 11,500 and 12,000 Christians have died since June 2015 when Nigeria's current government took power".<sup>92</sup> According to the study, jihadist Fulani militants were responsible for 7,400 Christian deaths, Boko Haram for 4,000, and "highway bandits" for another 150-200.<sup>93</sup> The report notes that most of the victims of attacks in north-eastern Nigeria by Boko Haram/ISWAP (Islamic State in West Africa) were Christians.<sup>94</sup>

On 5th April 2020, Fulani herdsman killed more than 60 Christians, including at least 13 Christians in Plateau state, in one month.<sup>95</sup>

On 12th April 2020, Fulani militants killed 12 Christians and kidnapped a couple from their church wedding ceremony in northwest Nigeria.<sup>96</sup>

On 23rd-25th April 2020, Fulani militants killed 13

Christians and kidnapped 13 others in five villages in Kaduna state.<sup>97</sup>

On 3rd May 2020, Fulani militants shot and killed three Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) members, and a Baptist Church member, Emmanuel Kure.<sup>98</sup>

On 22nd July 2020, members of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) posted a video on YouTube that showed the execution of five Christian development workers. In the video, which has since been removed from the platform, one of the attackers stated that the executions were carried out in retaliation for alleged efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity. The act came as “a message to all those being used by infidels to convert Muslims to Christianity.”<sup>99</sup>

On 5th August 2020, unidentified gunmen killed at least four Christians in the local church of Azikoro village in Bayelsa State.<sup>100</sup>

On 24th September 2020, Fulani militia killed five men, members of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) or Catholic churches in Jos South County’s K-Vom town, Vwang District.<sup>101</sup>

On 28th-29th November 2020, Fulani militants attacked predominantly Christian communities in Kaduna state killing seven Christians, two days after suspected Fulani militants killed Nigerian Baptist Convention pastor, Rev. Johnson Oladimeji, as he travelled home from Ikere-Ekiti.<sup>102</sup>

On 13th December, 2020, a special report released by The International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law concluded that from January 2020 to 13th December 2020, approximately 2,200 Christians were killed across Nigeria. “Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen accounted for 1,300 Christian deaths, followed by Boko Haram and its splinter groups (ISWAP and Ansaru) with 500 Christian deaths. The Nigerian Army also killed 200 Judeo-Christians in 2020 while Jihadist ‘Bandits’ accounted for 100 Christian deaths.”<sup>103</sup>

In the last two weeks of December 2020 approximately 200 Christians were killed. These included five kidnapped on Christmas Eve from Garkida (Adamawa) by ISWAP jihadists and beheaded on 29th December.<sup>104</sup> “Out of the about 200 Christian deaths, Boko Haram/ISWAP accounted for about 130 while Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen/

Fulani Bandits took responsibility for remaining 70 Christian deaths”.<sup>105</sup>

### Kidnappings

Time and again violent attacks and kidnappings, as a tool of terror, were carried out against Christian faithful, pastors, Catholic priests and members of religious orders. A representative selection includes:

On 19th February 2018, Boko Haram kidnapped 110 Dapchi schoolgirls. The government secured the release of the majority, only Leah Sharibu remained in captivity for refusing to renounce her Christian faith.<sup>106</sup>

On 1st March 2018, the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) kidnapped humanitarian aid workers working in Borno State for UNICEF. The others were captured, killed or released, but Alice Ngaddeh, a UNICEF nurse, remains a “slave”.<sup>107</sup>

On 29th March 2018, Pastor Pius Eromosele of the Church of God Mission at the Odighi community, Edo State, was abducted by suspected Fulani militants. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of N4m. On 3rd April, the decomposing body of Pastor Pius Eromosele was found.<sup>108</sup>

On 1st September 2018, Fr. Christopher Ogaga of the Emmanuel Catholic Church in Oviri-Okpe, Delta State, was kidnapped while travelling from Okpe to Warri.<sup>109</sup>

On 25th October 2018, five members of the Order of the Missionary of Martha and Mary of the Diocese of Issele-Uku were abducted in Delta State.<sup>110</sup>

On 6th November 2018, four priests were abducted by armed men near Abraka, Delta State, on their way to a meeting in Uhielle in neighbouring Edo State.<sup>111</sup>

On 25th March 2019, Fr. John Bako Shekwolo was kidnapped from his home in Ankuwai, Kaduna State. Some sources believe that he was murdered,<sup>112</sup> while others think that he is still held captive.<sup>113</sup>

On 16th June 2019, Fr. Isaac Agubi was abducted on his way from Auchu to Igarra while en route back home after celebrating Mass.

In 2019, Enugu State in southern Nigeria also reported abductions of Catholic priests. A total of nine priests were

taken between January 2019 and late November 2019, including Fr. Arinze Madu kidnapped on 28th October 2019; he was released on 30th October. On 25th November 2019, Fr. Malachy Asadu was kidnapped from the Diocese of Nsukka. He was also released two days later.

On 8th January 2020, armed men kidnapped four seminarians from the Good Shepherd Major Seminary in Kakau. The kidnappers eventually released three seminarians but killed 18-year-old Michael Nnadi after he refused to repudiate his faith.<sup>114</sup>

On 18th January 2020, in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, five aid workers kidnapped by the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) in 2016 while visiting displaced persons camps to provide medical and food items, were freed.<sup>115</sup>

On 1st March 2020, Fr. David Echioda was kidnapped by armed men while returning from Sunday Mass in Utonkon (Ado), Benue State.<sup>116</sup>

On 20th April 2020, the kidnappers of Rev. Anthony Oyi, an Anglican Priest in Issele-Mkpetime, in Aniocha, Delta State, demanded the sum of N15 million for his release.<sup>117</sup>

On 22nd April 2020, Fulani militants kidnapped Emmanuel Iliya Agiya, an elder and treasurer of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Atang village, Jema'a County.<sup>118</sup>

In July 2020, Fr. Amadasun Idahosa of the Holy Cross Cathedral, Benin City, was stopped by armed men on the road. In addition to the priest, the bandits abducted several other people who were held until families or friends paid a ransom.<sup>119</sup>

On 11th September 2020, four Christian farmers were abducted. The following day a further 17 Christians were kidnapped. All were members of either Baptist or Assemblies of God churches.<sup>120</sup>

Fr. Jude Onyebadi, a Catholic priest in Delta State, and three others were kidnapped from his home on 26th September 2020.<sup>121</sup> The clergyman's companions were released several hours later. The priest, on the other hand, was not released until three days later. The spokesman was unable to confirm if a ransom had been paid for Fr. Onyebadi's release. The kidnappers are believed to have been Muslim Fulani militants. (Fr. Onyebadi had already

been kidnapped in 2016 and released a few days later).<sup>122</sup>

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has banned paying any ransom for the release of priests and members of religious orders. Often, however, parishioners raise their own money to get their priests back.<sup>123</sup>

Christian groups have paid for release of captives. According to John Hayab, a Baptist pastor and vice president of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for 19 northern Nigerian states, said that in the 12-month (2019-2020) period, "\$1.1 million in ransom has been paid by Christians to secure release of captives".<sup>124</sup>

On 11th December 2020, a large gang of Boko Haram fighters attacked a boarding school in Katsina, in the north-centre of Nigeria. They kidnapped over 300 male students, and claimed responsibility for the attack citing Boko Haram's opposition to Western-style education.<sup>125</sup>

On 18th December, the Nigerian military freed the 344 students abducted. The governor of Nigeria's Katsina state, Aminu Masarithe claimed that no ransom had been paid.<sup>126</sup>

On 15th December 2020, Bishop Valentine Oluchukwu Ezeagu was kidnapped in Imo State travelling to his father's funeral in the neighbouring Anambra State. He was "unconditionally released" the following day.<sup>127</sup>

On 19th December 2020, militants kidnapped Rev. Luka Dani of the Evangelical Church Winning All in the village of Galumi. He was released on December 23.<sup>128</sup>

On 21st December 2020, Rev. Thomas James of the Godiya Baptist Church located in Gwazunu was abducted by Fulani militants.<sup>129</sup>

On 24th December 2020, militants attacked and beat Rev. Luka Shaho of the Assemblies of God Church in Ungwan Waziri. These then kidnapped the pastor's wife, Mrs. Jumai Luka. Her whereabouts are still unknown.<sup>130</sup>

In the last two weeks of December 2020 including Christmas Eve, 40 Christians were kidnapped by Boko Haram and ISWAP attacks on the Damaturu-Maiduguri Highway.<sup>131</sup> The extremist militants stopped vehicles and "forcefully separated Christians from Muslims and abducted over 35", killing "five others who tried to flee on the spot".<sup>132</sup> In the weeks leading up to Christmas Boko Haram/ISWAP had announced plans for violent attacks



against Christians as “a punishment for marking the ‘un-Godly feast of Christmas’”.<sup>133</sup>

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government imposed strict social isolation measures including the banning religious events and services, especially in hard-hit regions. Both Muslims and Christian religious leaders complained about the restrictions questioning why the government would close down churches, while allowing crowded markets to remain open.<sup>134</sup>

## PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In 2020, 60 years after the country gained its independence, the right to religious freedom in Nigeria has declined dramatically.

Fundamental societal challenges remain: widespread poverty, corruption, a lack of security, and a disenfranchised youthful population, as well as ethnic and resource-based conflicts, provide fuel for the rise of extremist Islamist militants in both the northern and central states. The unwilling or ineffective resolution by the authorities to these challenges results in unrestrained brutal incidents of terror and killing.

Often, those hardest hit are Christians (particularly by Islamist terrorists) evidenced by a litany of kidnapping and killings of Church leaders and faithful. But Muslims, particularly in the majority Muslim north, have also been heavily victimised, traumatised by the persistent violence of armed Islamist extremists and a lack of security.

In the period under review, Nigeria’s Catholic bishops have repeatedly drawn attention to the suffering of the population and ineffective security response demanding the government to address the fundamental issues, even calling on President Buhari’s government to resign due to its blatant failure to tackle the situation.<sup>135</sup> Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto made a particularly forceful appeal to President Muhammadu Buhari on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Nigeria’s independence on 1st October 2020.<sup>136</sup> In his message, the prelate called for a radical change in policy in order to rapidly end the violence, stop the nepotism that favours certain Muslim elites, and put a halt to the murder of Christian farmers, mainly by Muslim Fulani militants.

As long as Nigeria’s political elites are not genuinely guided by a desire to promote the common good rather than pursue interests along political, ethnic or religious lines, no substantial improvement to the human right of religious freedom can be expected.<sup>137</sup>

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