



5.1.2018

NIGERIA | Churches Protest Violence

Churches across Nigeria protested peacefully April 29 against Fulani herder militia violence and the continuing captivity of Leah Sharibu and 112 girls from Chibok, who are being held by Boko Haram terrorists.

The nationwide protests were in response to a call by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on April 25 for two Sundays of protest and mourning, on April 25 and May 6. The call was issued following the murders by Fulani herder militia men of two Catholic priests, Father Joseph Gor and Father Felix Tyolaha, and 15 of their parishioners on April 24. The protests also coincided with the end of three days of fasting and prayer initiated by the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) for the release of Leah Sharibu and the remaining Chibok girls.

Chanting "enough is enough," "no more bloodshed" and other slogans, church members held up banners calling, among other things, for the president to focus on releasing the girls and restoring law and order. Protests reportedly occurred in several states, including Benin, Benue, Ekiti, Kaduna, Lagos, Rivers, Oyo, Osun and Plateau states, and in the Federal Capital, Abuja. While congregations in less secure areas chose to protest or pray within their church compounds or buildings, others were able to hold marches; and in the case of one church in Plateau state, to kneel in the street and pray.

In addition, 1,000 signers from different denominations gathered at St. Michael Catholic Church in the One Television area of Kaduna City for an afternoon performance aimed at drawing the world's attention to Leah Sharibu's plight. Some of the signers held placards with solidarity messages for Leah, while others called on the government and her abductors for her release.

In a keynote address delivered at the event, the Most Rev. Fr. Williams Kaura Abba, said, "At no time did we feel so unsafe in our nation as we now feel. If it is not Boko Haram killing people, it is Fulani herdsmen terrorists wielding AK-47, snuffing with impunity the lives of farmers. If it is not bandits holding their victims hostage for a ransom, then it is government using state might to kill

and clamp down on adherents of a religious sect. These attacks must be brought to an end and government must spare no effort to ensuring that this happens real quick. Impunity of girl-child theft and forceful conversion to Islam is on the rise."

Violence by Fulani herder militia continues. At least 40 people were killed and several others sustained injuries in an armed attack on the Janruwa community in Maganda District, Birnin-Gwari Local Government Area (LGA) of Kaduna State on April 28. According to witnesses, the militia surrounded the community at around 11.45 p.m. before moving in while shooting sporadically. The victims were mostly local miners and villagers. A number of them had been set on fire and burned beyond recognition.

According to the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, since 2011 over 60,000 people have died in herder-related violence. In southern Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba and Benue states, entire communities have been displaced and taken over by herdsmen. In Benue state alone, Governor Samuel Ortom reports that 1,878 people were murdered between 2013 and 2016, 750 were seriously injured, 200 went missing and 99,427 households were affected, with billions of naira worth of property destroyed.

In a press statement released April 27, CAN said, "The bottom line is that President Buhari failed woefully to protect Nigerians", and called on President Buhari to immediately take steps to permanently dismantle both Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen. The organization also called for The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, which has at times excused, explained and even threatened violence, to be banned "for promoting terror and bloodshed in the country."

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We stand together with the Church in Nigeria as it speaks truth to power and draws attention to the grave situation across the country. The statistics are a damning indictment of the Nigerian government's inability or unwillingness to secure the basic, fundamental rights of its citizens – including the right to an education for the kidnapped girls. We support the Church in its efforts to draw attention to these issues, and urge the government to seek and implement an effective remedy without delay."