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## **NIGERIA | Herder Militia Attack Death Toll Rises**

The number of deaths in attacks by Fulani herder militia on communities in the Barkin Ladi, Bokkos and Riyom Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Plateau State, Nigeria from June 22-24 currently stands at 238.

The death toll was confirmed in a press release issued June 28 and signed by Rev. Dr. Soja Bewarang, Chairman of the Denominational Heads and Christian Association of Nigeria in Plateau State. The statement expresses concern at the “wanton attacks by herdsman, bandits and terrorists” that have caused “over 6,000 deaths in 2018 alone in northern and middle belt states,” and asserts that the herder militia attacks in particular are aimed at “ethnic cleansing, land grabbing and forceful ejection of the Christian natives from their ancestral land and heritage.”

It includes calls for the reconstitution of the heads of the nation’s security agencies, who it describes as “skewed to one religion and region” and consistently showing “grave bias and incompetency in tackling the country’s “wide insecurity challenges.” Other calls include the need for the government to rebuild and adequately protect devastated communities, to enlighten nomadic herders on modern forms of cattle rearing, and, rather than appropriating land on the herders’ behalf, to encourage them to purchase land for ranches, given the fact that they are involved in private business. It also calls on the government to “stem the tide” of abduction, forced conversion and marriage without parental consent of underage Christian girls by members of Muslim communities, and to do more to secure the releases of Leah Sharibu and the remaining Chibok Girls “without further delay.”

The statement echoes demands made earlier by the Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom, and the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) for the arrest and prosecution of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) leadership “for not only taking responsibility for the various attacks, but justifying the killings as retaliation over cattle rustled by unknown persons.” On June 25, the chairman of the North-Central Zone of MACBAN, Danladi Ciroma, caused widespread outrage when he admitted the Plateau State killings were in retaliation for the loss of around 300 cows, adding that “since these cows were not found, no one should expect peace in the areas.”

“What is happening in Plateau state and other selected states in Nigeria is pure genocide and must be stopped immediately,” the release states, rejecting the characterization of Fulani militia attacks as “farmer-herder clashes.” CSW sources also report local anxiety regarding the emergence of a narrative that erroneously depicts militia attacks in Plateau State as tit-for-tat violence between the Fulani and Berom tribes, despite the fact that every tribe indigenous to the state is experiencing attacks and suffering fatalities.

Reports are emerging of house-to-house searches for weapons being conducted in victim communities following the latest killings in Plateau State; however, there are no reports of similar searches occurring in Fulani communities.

There are also reports of a crackdown by Plateau State authorities on Christian leaders and indigenous youth groups who participated in a protest on June 27 against the killings, with several reportedly arrested, including the CAN chairman of the northern zone youth wing, Rev. Canon Nenman Gowon. The protest, which was initially peaceful, reportedly turned violent after security personnel at government house opened fired on protestors, who were insistent on handing a petition directly to the state governor and had refused to disperse.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW extends its deepest condolences to all who have lost loved ones in the weekend of attacks in Plateau State. Attempts to justify these massacres as retaliation for the loss of cattle are utterly abhorrent and must be condemned in the strongest terms by the government of Nigeria. It is worrying that the authorities appear more focused on controlling victim communities than on tracing, disarming and arresting the perpetrators of this violence. We urge the state and federal governments to prioritize the protection and rehabilitation of vulnerable communities, and to refrain from victimizing them further. We also reiterate our call for the formulation of a comprehensive and holistic security strategy that adequately resources the security forces to address the Fulani militia and other threats to national security as a matter of urgency.”