

Nigeria: A Dangerous Agenda

Radio Documentary Transcript

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Christians in Nigeria are facing a new hazard – heavily armed herdsmen who are attacking their villages and driving them from their homes. Observers say the mainly Muslim Fulani herders are now slaughtering six times as many people as Boko Haram terrorists.

Some are warning of a jihad, intended to wipe the north clean of its Christians, while others foresee danger in portraying the conflict as a religious war.

This report from Andrew Boyd of Release International picks up on the aftermath of a Fulani attack in Nigeria. The villagers claim security forces, who were supposed to protect them, sided with their attackers...

In: [Music] 'Tuesday night, yes...'

Dur: 22 mins 41 secs

Out: 'That's our prayer request.'

Back announcement: Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi there ending that report from Andrew Boyd of Release International, on the growing Fulani attacks in Nigeria that some believe is a jihad against Christians.

Transcript:

Release International Team in Nigeria:

'Tuesday night, yes?'

'After it was getting a bit darker, we just heard gunshots from all corners of the town. From the south and the west and the east. They just surrounded the village, they threw everybody into confusion.'

Narr:

'A team from Release International investigates an attack on a Christian village in Nigeria.'

Release International Team in Nigeria:

'We're looking at the remains of the pastor's house in the village, there's the storerooms and there's still flames coming from the fires here. So the food has been destroyed, the stores have been destroyed... so sad.'

Narr:

'Retired policeman, Gwarim, describes what happened...'

Gwarim:

'And these Fulani people, they came with the help of the soldier men. The security people that were meant to secure us, to guard us, they helped them. After they came, they started shooting – that is the security men – started shooting the inhabitants, the villagers.'

'They came with the Fulanis?'

'They came with the Fulanis. So in fact they took over the whole village... on fire. They were burning everything.'

'And was anybody hurt or killed in the attack?'

'That's right, yes. A woman was killed in the house... One lady was burned alive... all the foodstuffs burned...'

'Right.'

'They want to take over our place. Because this is a jihad. They are fighting jihad.'

'I can still feel the heat, as I get closer to it. I can still feel the heat.'

Narr:

'What's being claimed here is this attack on a Christian village was carefully organised, that security guards who were supposed to protect the villagers were actually working with the attackers, armed Fulani herdsmen, who waited till nightfall to set upon the village. There have been many attacks like it... Juliet was 15 when Fulani raiders set fire to her village.'

Juliet:

'The Fulani attacked our village and burnt everything we have. We came back to Jos empty-handed, none of us carrying anything... Jesus really saved my life, because when I was in the village I was very sick. I didn't know that I would come back alive. I don't how I managed but I ran out of the village. Jesus kept me safe from that day.'

Narr:

'Juliet now shares a camp for orphans in Plateau State with Abednego Solomon and his sister Goodness. Their faces are riven with scars from machetes, from the day the Fulani came. Abednego struggles to recall what happened when the herdsmen shot his father...'

Abednego:

'They started shooting him in the hip. And then they ran in, inside our house.'

Narr:

'Abednego says the herdsmen killed his father and brother. And when he tried to run, they shot his legs. And then they set about him with machetes.'

Abednego:

'And then they start cutting me with a knife.'

Narr:

'That was six years ago. Abednego was just ten, and his sister Goodness was only five. Her face was split apart by a machete, leaving a scar running cheek to cheek across the bridge of her nose. Today, one eye isn't functioning as it should and her mind has blanked out what happened.'

Goodness:

'If people could pray for you, what would you want them to say?'

'I want them to pray for my future.'

Narr:

'Paul Robinson of Release International takes the little girl's hand and prays.'

Paul Robinson:

'Heavenly and holy Father, we are looking to you now. We pray for these two dear, lovely beautiful children and what they have been through. And I ask you, Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to release them from the shock of everything that they have experienced. In Jesus' name, amen.'

'Amen.'

Mark Lipdo:

'People, here ... I can't get an adjective to classify their type of trauma. It is horrible.'

Narr:

'Mark Lipdo provides trauma counselling to attack victims. His work is supported by UK-based Release.'

Mark Lipdo:

'You know, sometimes you don't even want to hear it, because you don't have the capacity to handle it, because someone will tell you that in their presence the father

was laid down and his body was cut into pieces and they were asked to bury it. I mean, people here are living with that kind of reality. How can someone like that be able to forgive? It is only in taking, coming close to him and putting your hands around him and affirming that God is still cares for him.'

Narr:

'The reality of conflict is becoming increasingly commonplace in Nigeria. The country has been ranked third on the Global Terrorism Index – for four years running, and has risen to 12th place on the World Watch List of worst offenders for religious persecution. Illia Djardi is their former African Bureau Chief. He gave evidence recently to parliamentarians.'

Illia Djardi:

'There are more and more attacks. At that point, we are no longer able to report them on a daily basis, because it is just too much. The attacks taking place in Middle Belt Nigeria are now well organised by people who are well organised, well-armed. And also they are more and more deadly. The scale of violence. There is a new dimension. There is a new trend.'

Baroness Cox:

'My Lords, last time I was in Nigeria I visited four villages which had been destroyed by Fulani. I stood in the rubble of a pastor's home where he had been slaughtered and I did see there the huge numbers of Fulani cattle roaming through the destroyed villages.'

Narr:

'Human rights campaigner Baroness Cox in the House of Lords. The scale of this violence is growing. According to the US Colson Centre, some 6,000 Christians were killed in 2018 alone by jihadi herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorists. The Colson Centre calls it a genocide. International Christian Concern says up to 70,000 Christians have been killed there in the past 20 years. And the Global Terrorism Index says Fulani extremists are now responsible for six times as many deaths as Boko Haram.'

Boko Haram:

'Bring back our girls. Bring back our army.'

Narr:

'It was Boko Haram insurgents who kidnapped the Chibok girls – and many others. '

Boko Haram:

'Jonathan! Jonathan! Girl, girl, girl, girl , Christian! Bring back our army!'

Narr:

'Boko Haram have killed upwards of 20,000 and driven 2 million from their homes. They've extended the conflict to neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon.'

Boko Haram:

'Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill. So hate! This war is against Christians.'

Narr:

'Hard to hear, but that's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, this time urging supporters to "Kill, kill, kill. This war," he says, "is against Christians." Boko Haram has split into factions pledging allegiance to Islamic State. But Fulani militants... Where do they fit in? And why are they now killing six times as many as the extremists Boko Haram? Human rights campaigner Baroness Cox in the House of Lords...

Baroness Cox:

'My Lords, over recent decades, thousands of Christians have been killed, hundreds of churches burnt and homes destroyed. But in the last two to three years they have adopted a new policy – attacking Christian villages, killing local people, destroying homes, driving villagers off their lands and settling in their place.

'My Lords, there are concerns that the Fulani militants are now so well armed that they are possibly fighting a proxy war for Boko Haram, with the shared agenda of driving Christians out of their homelands in northern and central-belt Nigeria.'

Narr:

'A shared agenda of driving out Christians... Many see a religious war in the making. But others hotly dispute that, characterising this as a tribal clash over scarce resources.

'At a recent meeting with parliamentarians, a Muslim member of the House of Lords warned that fake news was framing a dangerous narrative. A representative of the BBC also warned against portraying the conflict in religious terms. Politicians of both sides were all too willing to play the religion card. Nigeria, she said, was a tinderbox, which could easily be set alight by inflammatory reporting.

'Given the polarisation in the country, Nigerian media can be excitable and has been known to play fast and loose with the facts. The BBC has produced its own report on fake news in Nigeria and the BBC in turn, has been accused of consistently downplaying the religious dimension.

Illia Djadi

'They are in denial. It's a fact, a matter of fact.'

Narr:

'Illia Djadi believes the BBC has its head in the sand. He's a Senior Analyst for Open Doors. The media, he believes, must dig deeper.'

Illia Djadi

'Time has come to go and investigate from a human rights perspective and see who are the victims and who are the attackers. Why they're in denial.'

Narr:

'News reports often portray the violence as tit-for-tat clashes between equally aggressive parties. This form of fence sitting is passed off as balanced reporting. But Christian Solidarity Worldwide have dug deeper. They've documented every attack in the first quarter of 2018. They found Fulani militia carried out 100 of those attacks, while just 7 were carried out against the Fulani. The Fulani killed 1000 while settlers killed 61.'

'What those stark figures suggest is that many more attacks have been started by the Fulani.'

'Illia Djadi has Fulani relatives. He knows the Fulani well, but these – these aggressors are different...'

Illia Djadi

'The Fulani we are talking about now are carrying AK-47s. They are well-armed, well-organised, they are shouting "Allahu Akbar". They are Fulani militants, they are Fulani jihadists. Let's call them terrorists. They are terrorists because they are killing people. They are killing children, they are killing elderly people, they are killing women. They are destroying everything!'

Narr:

'But the crucial question is why? And why now?'

'Who are these heavily armed nomadic herdsman? There are millions of Fulani in the Sahel and West Africa. And for years these mainly Muslim herders have managed to co-exist with the largely Christian settlers in the north-east of Nigeria.'

'So what's changed? Creeping desertification for one thing. The Fulani are struggling to find fertile land. In that struggle they've taken up arms, and in so doing some say they're now serving the same agenda as Boko Haram and other Islamists – to turn Nigeria into an Islamic state.'

Ben Kwashi:

'These killers have specifically targeted the Christian settlement areas in the north-east.'

Narr:

'Benjamin Kwashi is the Anglican archbishop of Jos in Middle-belt Plateau State, where many attacks have taken place.'

Ben Kwashi:

'The people killed are actually Christians. The people killed are farmers. The people killed are armless. The people killed are helpless, they are very poor; they are literally the poor of the poorest.'

Narr:

'Today, Archbishop Kwashi conducts more funeral services than christenings and marriages combined. He is a partner of Release International, which supports persecuted Christians around the world. As is Mark Lipdo, who runs the Stefanos Foundation and is constantly called out to the scene of attacks.'

Mark Lipdo:

'Now communities are targeted by militant groups in the night. People are sleeping with their families in their homes and militant groups in the hundreds are unleashed in those communities, setting their houses on fire and killing those who are trying to escape. So that is overwhelming.'

Narr:

'So how are these militants able to get away with it? The answer appears to be with impunity. But why? Some accuse the government of turning a blind eye. Some suggest elements in the military are colluding with the attackers... as this villager told Release International, amid the still smouldering rubble.'

Collusion claim:

'When the military were able to send the believers out of the community, they were coming with their guns while the Fulani were following them behind and burning their houses, their homes.'

'So the Fulani start coming, the community look as though they're going to defend themselves, so the military come in to chase the community out so that the Fulani can come in to destroy the village. So that's collusion in the highest sense, isn't it?'

Narr:

'Earlier, we heard the claim that security guards had sided with the Fulani. Now, that the Nigerian military joined in the attack. Could elements within the military have bought into the same agenda as Boko Haram, to turn Nigeria into an Islamic state – beginning with the north?'

'12 northern states have now adopted Sharia law, and Nigeria's President Buhari has described it as his 'God-given legal responsibility' to implement Sharia across Nigeria, even though the country has a secular constitution. President Buhari is ex-military and a Fulani from the north.'

'200 years ago, it was Fulanis from the north who waged war to establish the Sokoto Caliphate. And today, it is from these northern states that Christians are being driven out. Is it any wonder some fear that history could be repeating itself? Mark Lipdo.'

Mark Lipdo:

'We are seeing outright killing of Christians, complete wiping of communities of Christians in Nigeria.'

Illia Djadi:

'One side we have farmers who are predominantly Christians. And the herders are predominantly Muslims. So, definitely there is a religious dimension.'

Narr:

'In Benue state alone, the Fulani have destroyed 500 churches. And in the view of many Nigerian Christians, that religious dimension is paramount. It explains the scale and the extent of the attacks against the Christian community, which they have come to expect from Boko Haram in the name of jihad.'

'To those on the ground, these latest attacks also look like, sound like and feel like a jihad. Remember this from earlier?'

Atmos:

'They want to take over our place. Because this is a jihad. They are fighting jihad.'

Narr:

'To refuse to recognise that, believes Lord Alton, is simply caving in to political correctness. And the British government must acknowledge that.'

Lord Alton: 'I ask the minister, given the escalation, frequency, organisation and asymmetry of Fulani attacks, does she still believe references to "farmer-herder clashes" still suffice? Some local observers have gone so far as to describe the rising attacks as a campaign of ethno-religious cleansing.'

Narr:

'And Lord Alton wants to know who is arming the Fulani, and why?'

Lord Alton:

'Armed with sophisticated weaponry, including AK47s and, in at least one, a rocket launcher and rocket-propelled grenades, the Fulani militia have murdered more men, women and children in 2015, 16 and 17 than even Boko Haram, destroying, overrunning and seizing property and land, and displacing tens of thousands of people.'

'This is organised and systematic. We must ask where this group of "nomadic herdsman" is getting such sophisticated weaponry from. While recognising complex, underlying causes of this violence, we must also acknowledge a growing degree of religious motivation behind this violence.'

Narr:

'The time has come to stop downplaying this as nothing more than a clash between farmers and herders, believes Baroness Cox, speaking in the same debate.'

Baroness Cox:

'My Lords, there is real fear that these developments are part of a strategy by Islamist fundamentalists to drive Christians out of their traditional homelands in northern and central-belt regions of Nigeria. And I urge Her Majesty's Government to respond appropriately to the very real possibility of religious cleansing.'

Illia Djadi

'There is a clear agenda. Someone is behind this, the level of the sophistication, the scale of the attack is violent... There is a clear agenda. There is a new dimension which needs to be investigated and acknowledged.'

Narr:

'That call to investigate is echoed by Release International partner Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi:'

Ben Kwashi:

'We must get to the root of an issue and identify it correctly and name it for what it is so that we can deal with the problem.'

'I want the Nigerian government to rise up to truth. To provide security for these poor Christians and to protect them. They deserve it. That's what the Nigerian government must do for every citizen, and especially for the vulnerable.'

'It is an unjust government that will allow the poor to be decimated the way Nigerian poor people are being killed. They are subsistence farmers, they are ordinary people, and even if they are being killed for their faith it makes even the government unjust the more, because the Nigerian constitution provides for indiscriminate protection for all citizens.'

'So I'm calling on the Nigerian government to rise up to its responsibilities and to do so justly.'

Narr:

'So here is the dilemma: if we raise even the possibility of a religious agenda behind this conflict – a jihad in other words – we risk pouring petrol on a conflagration. But if

that religious dimension is *real* and the world is ignoring it, then how can the root causes of this bitter conflict be addressed? Whether or not the Fulani militants are consciously engaged in jihad, by attacking and driving out Christians from the north, the agenda they are serving is the same as Boko Haram and the Islamists who back them. It is the agenda of religious war.'

Illia Djadi

'There is a mastermind, someone may be behind them, I don't know, from politics or religious background. There's a need to investigate why this is happening now. We need to act and stop it.'

Lord Alton:

'People are dying daily.... The Archbishop of Abuja described what he called, I quote: "Territorial conquest and ethnic cleansing" and said, "the very survival of our nation is at stake." This alone should serve as a wake-up call. Are we to watch one of Africa's greatest countries go the way of Sudan? We must not wait for a genocide to happen, as it did in Rwanda. Ominously, my Lords, history could very easily be repeated.'

400 Fulani came:

'At a rough guess how many Fulani would you say there were who came?'

'There were almost 400. There were very many.'

Samuel 8 dead clip:

'You fled, as everybody else fled?'

'Almost all of the villagers.'

'So how many people were inside the house?'

'Eight. The father, mother, and the grandmother and the wife.'

'Your father, your mother, your grandmother, your wife and all four of your children, were all burned?'

'Yes. They were 11 years, nine years, six years, two years. Yes.'

Ben Kwashi:

Pray for us – out of our sufferings will come out the kind of Christian faith that will be admired, both on earth and in heaven, depicting the love of Jesus Christ, fervent in preaching the gospel and living the gospel. And in investing everything God has given to us in the mission of the gospel of Christ. That's our prayer request.'

ENDS

22'41"