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NIGERIA Seven dead as village is targeted in Plateau State

Seven people were killed and at least four others were injured when armed Fulani Muslims attacked Rikwe Chengu Village in the Kwal District of Miango Bassa Local Government Area (LGA) in Plateau State on December 2. The victims, including a two-month-old baby, were given a mass burial on December 3.

The attack took place between 10 pm and 11 pm, as villagers were sleeping. One eyewitness described how men dressed in camouflage fired shots to create panic while others set houses ablaze and attacked fleeing villagers. Five women and children were hacked down as they fled, while a mother and her child were burnt to death in their home. One villager lost his two-year-old daughter, six-year-old son and sister in law.

A quarter of the homes in Rikwe Chengu were destroyed during the attack, which occurred a little over a month after a similar attack on Ranwianku village, also in Bassa LGA, during which Fulani attackers killed two women and four children, including a three-month-old child.

The targeting of women and children has become a regular characteristic of armed attacks on non-Muslim villages in Plateau State. The recent attacks have also occurred within relatively close proximity of an army barracks. Despite being alerted while the attack on Rikwe Chengu was underway, soldiers did not arrive until the earlier hours of the next morning, by which time male villagers had organized their own protection. The soldiers shot a villager who was carrying a local hunting gun and detained others, accusing them of being attackers. Commander of the Joint Task Force, Brigadier General Umaru, later claimed the men were arrested for possessing illegal weapons, and had been handed over to the police. However, villagers are so incensed that they are demanding the removal of the Joint Task Force from the state.

CSW-UK's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston says, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Rikwe Chengu Village as they mourn the loss of their loved ones. The deliberate targeting of women and children is an extremely sinister development, for which there can be no justification. Worse still, the villagers appear to have been victimized afresh by the unwarranted reaction of the Joint Task Force following its delayed arrival at the scene. CSW is deeply concerned by the increasing frequency of attacks by armed Fulani Muslims in Plateau State, which, combined with the unwillingness or inability of the armed forces to adequately protect innocent civilians, is contributing to an increasingly lawless environment. We once again urge Federal and State authorities to ensure that vulnerable communities are protected and planners and perpetrators of violence are swiftly brought to justice."