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NIGERIA Evidence emerges of possible military collusion in village attack in Plateau State

A total of 18 people died and four were seriously injured during armed attacks on Monday by Hausa-Fulani Muslims on four remote villages in the Barkin Ladi and Riyom areas of Plateau State, central Nigeria.

Survivors of an attack on Wereng village in Riyom in which the 13 victims were mainly women and children say the attackers included men in military uniform, and the military ID and bank savings book of a member of the joint military force charged with enforcement of peace in the state was recovered at the scene.

Chairman of Riyom Local Government Area (LGA) Simon Mwadkwon, says he alerted the Joint Task Force as the attack was underway, but was informed the force had no orders to intervene. In a statement Mr. Mwadkwon commented: "The Local Government is using her meager resources, tax payer's money meant for development, we give them every week for security. So what are we paying for? Are we paying for our people to be killed continuously? If we must have peace for the Plateau, they must really search themselves and not take sides."

There has been increasing unrest since the bombings in Jos on Christmas Eve. As confidence in the Joint Task Force has disappeared in the face of continuing attacks, some youths are now taking matters into their own hands. Most recently, on Friday, seven Muslim passengers died during an attack on a vehicle on the Mangu Bisichi Road in Jos. The next day at least 35 people were killed when Muslim youths joined forces with supporters of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), launching attacks in the Bauchi Road area and killing Christians on four major streets, including many people from the Igbo tribe of eastern Nigeria who, along with others, were transiting from the southern city of Lagos to Yola in Adamawa State in a commercial bus. On Sunday, violence spread to Anglo Jos, Rahol-Kaneng and Bukuru. Then on Tuesday, two more non-Muslim villages on the outskirts of Jos were attacked.

The situation in Plateau State is further exacerbated by the unchecked proliferation of arms on both sides. In Anglo Jos, youths on both sides were seen sporting AK 47s, while according to unconfirmed reports, a rocket-propelled grenade was utilized in Bukuru. The government has drafted in 1500 policemen to quell the violence, while Hausa Fulani from neighboring states are reported to be flooding into the area to take part in the fighting. In a comment to CSW a local source described the atmosphere as "charged", adding: "we just don't know... we are just waiting for the war."

CSW Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said: "Unfortunately, the current plight in Jos is a direct consequence of years of failure to address the root causes of violence and to punish planners and perpetrators. Years of impunity, coupled with a failure to provide protection for vulnerable communities have created a situation where weapons now proliferate, and the discovery of the military ID of a member of the force assigned to ensure protection could constitute a worrying implication of some level military complicity in the violence. While the drafting of additional police to the area is welcome, what is really needed is a complete overhaul of the military presence in Plateau State. It is vital that the Joint Task Force is cleansed of any element of sectarianism, and becomes far more proactive in the prevention of violence".