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NIGERIA Six villages attacked overnight in Plateau State

Six villages near Jos in Nigeria's Plateau State were attacked overnight by a group of Fulani and Hausa Muslims on January 27. Five people were killed, three of whom were shot by soldiers attending the scene, who mistook them for attackers.

The attacks on Nding Jok, Lo Hala, Jong, Wereh, Fan and Ratatis (also known as Dorowa Babuje) in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA) occurred between midnight and 3am. Despite being alerted as the attacks got underway, soldiers did not arrive in the area until around 5am, when they proceeded to shoot three youths.

The soldiers later arrested 29 men believed to have been involved in the attacks, who were heavily armed with automatic weapons, axes and machetes. They also reportedly found 25 automatic weapons hidden in a mosque in Ratatis village. Later that day a number of villagers burnt down some nearby Fulani settlements in reprisal, forcing the inhabitants to flee.

In a statement, a spokesman for the Joint Task Force confirmed the arrests of 29 people, one of whom is a police corporal with the Abuja mobile police force. However, the spokesman made no comment on the guns recovered from the mosque.

There is continuing concern at the inadequate protection of vulnerable villages in Plateau State, particularly since attackers are using increasingly sophisticated weaponry. There are also fears that as Nigeria's political authorities focus on the coming general elections, effective action to address the situation in the state may not occur for some time.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "While we are pleased that some attackers have been caught, it is regrettable that innocent villagers appear to have been victimised once again by the security forces following their own delayed arrival at the scene. It is troubling that the absence of reliable and timely protection from the security forces is forcing people in remote areas to take measures to ensure their own safety, and that this in turn renders them vulnerable to a tendency by these forces to shoot first and ask questions later. The situation in Plateau State requires urgent attention and cannot be allowed to fester until elections are concluded. CSW therefore calls on federal and state authorities to urgently address this chronic violence by overhauling the current security arrangements in order to ensure adequate, unbiased and timely protection for innocent civilians."

Notes to Editors:

1. Photographs are available from the CSW press office.