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NIGERIA Tensions persist in Bauchi State following armed attack

Tensions remain high in the Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area (LGA) of Bauchi State following an armed attack in the early hours of March 10.

According to reports, a large group of Fulani men armed with high-powered rifles and other weaponry descended on the area, shooting randomly and torching homes. While news agencies report that three people died in house fires, local churches, who are still collating their losses, say the final death toll is likely to be higher.

According to information received by the Bauchi Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the attackers were part of a group of around 2,000 militants who had allegedly planned to "storm the area for fourteen days". According to one report received by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), local residents, who had been on the alert since receiving threats of an attack scheduled for 6 March, eventually managed to chase their attackers away. Police reinforcements are now reported to be stationed in the area.

Tafawa Balewa is predominantly inhabited by non-Muslims from the Tsayawa tribe. The area has experienced numerous sectarian attacks since 1991, when a disagreement between a Fulani man and a Tsayawa meat seller escalated into violence in which villages were burnt, 173 churches were destroyed, and 400 people lost their lives.

In 1995, 30 Tsayawa villages were razed to the ground and 140 people were killed, including 36 women and children who had taken refuge in a church in Gungu-Zango Village. In June 2000, following the introduction of "full *Shari'a*", Muslim youths set fire to homes and a church, and between June and October 2001, approximately 30 people were killed and eighteen injured by armed Fulanis, some of whom reportedly came from Mali, Niger and Chad.

More recently, in April 2010, the Reverend and Mrs. Ishaya Kada of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) were dragged from their home, hacked to death and burnt to ashes by Muslim assailants, and in January this year, Tafawa Balewa witnessed further sectarian violence following a disagreement between youths that left several dead and churches and mosques destroyed. Elsewhere in January, a Sunday church service at the Methodist Church in the centre of the state capital, Bauchi Town, was disrupted when a bomb was left under a pew in a laptop bag by a young man who entered the building towards the end of the service, and fled on a waiting motorcycle.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "CSW's thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this appalling pre-dawn attack on innocent villagers. It is deeply disturbing that a sinister phenomenon that is currently directed against villagers in Plateau State may now be occurring in Bauchi. The information received by CAN Bauchi regarding the presence of a large, well-armed militia in the area is also very disturbing. While we commend the stationing of additional security in the area, in order to truly ensure peace and stability the Government of Bauchi State and the Federal Government of Nigeria must move decisively to apprehend this group before it launches further attacks".