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## NIGERIA Military opens fire on female farmers protesting destruction of farmland

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Members of the Joint Task Force (JTF) charged with maintaining peace in Plateau State opened fire on a protest yesterday by hundreds of female farmers from Gyeri Village, seven kilometers from Bukuru, wounding three of them.

The farmers had marched to the military outpost in protest at the lack of intervention during an attack by Fulani tribesmen armed with machetes on over 14 farms that had destroyed crops as they were ripening. The raid, which is thought to have begun on Monday evening, has affected farmland covering a three kilometer radius.

Local sources informed Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that the timing of this destruction was calculated to cause both anger and hardship. Not only was a bumper harvest anticipated this year, but the farmers, who are mostly women, had also sunk their savings into acquiring costly fertilizer for their farms, and cannot replant because the rainy season is now at its peak.

As hundreds of women dressed in black defied the torrential rain to mount a protest at the nearby military outpost, the soldiers responded by shooting two of them in the hip and one in the foot. Eyewitnesses also confirmed that the soldiers continued firing into the air for at least fifteen minutes before stopping. So far neither the JTF nor the Plateau State authorities have issued a statement on the incident.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston says, "Not only have these women lost their harvest, which was both an investment and source of income and food for their families, in a calculated act of destruction, but they have also been let down by the security forces, who not only failed to intervene to protect them, but inexplicably opened fire on them. This is inexcusable, and a dire dereliction of duty. We urge the Plateau State authorities to act swiftly to ensure effective protection for these and other farmers during this crucial season, and to conduct a swift and thorough investigation into the shooting of unarmed protesters."