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NIGERIA Military suspected of involvement in attacks on villages

Members of the Nigerian military have been implicated in violence in Plateau State after military identification documents were allegedly recovered from the scene of an attack that occurred in the early hours of Monday, August 15.

Four military identity documents were allegedly found after the attack on the community of Heipang, located close to Jos Airport, where nine people were killed. Eight of the victims were members of the same family.

The attack on Heipang was the latest of a series of attacks that have occurred since August 11, when three members of the same family were killed and another was injured following an attack by armed Hausa-Fulanis on Foron village in Barkin Ladi, situated around 3km from Heipang. According to unconfirmed reports, a military issue helmet and blood-stained belt were found at the site. Like Heipang, Foron was also attacked during the early hours of August 15. This time three villagers were killed, and according to a number of eyewitnesses, the attackers were soldiers who fled the scene afterwards in a military-issue Hilux van complete with sirens.

There have been a number of worrying reports regarding the conduct of members of the Joint Task Force (JTF) charged with maintaining peace in Plateau State, ranging from lack of intervention in raids on villages to suspected collusion of soldiers in the violence. According to unconfirmed reports, one of the victims in Heipang allegedly received a call from the JTF men assigned to that area asking him to come out and assist them, only to be gunned down as he left from his house. However, in a statement to the press, the spokesman for the JTF claimed the man had been shot by the police after being mistaken for an attacker.

On August 2, CSW reported that members of the JTF opened fire on a protest by hundreds of female farmers from Gyeri Village, seven kilometres from Bukuru in Plateau State, 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.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "The renewed increase in attacks on remote communities, coupled with reports of possible military collusion, continue to undermine any residual confidence in the JTF to ensure peace and security in Plateau State. Consequently, many communities are now making alternative arrangements for their own protection. While this may be understandable given current circumstances, it is a sad indictment of those in authority, as ultimate responsibility for the protection of all citizens lies with state and federal authorities. A proliferation of vigilante groups is no replacement for effective law enforcement. CSW urges the federal and state governments to prioritize the unbiased enforcement of the rule of law in Plateau State, and to swiftly apprehend and prosecute any soldiers or civilians implicated in this appalling violence."