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NIGERIA Partial curfew in Plateau State after two politicians among those killed in weekend violence

The government of Plateau State placed four local government areas under curfew yesterday following a gun attack that left two prominent politicians dead. Senator for Plateau State North Gyang Dalyop Datong and the Honorable Gyang James Fulani, Majority Leader in the Plateau State House of Assembly, died during an attack on the mass burial of victims of armed raids on a number of villages over the weekend by Fulani tribesmen.

An estimated 12 villages in Riyom and Barkin Ladi, situated on the outskirts of the state capital Jos, were attacked simultaneously on Saturday July 7 by hundreds of heavily armed gunmen wearing military camouflage and bullet proof vests, in raids reminiscent of the 2010 attacks on Dogo Nahauwa, Zot and Ratsat villages in Jos South, which claimed an estimated 400 lives. Early news reports suggest that at least 25 people are confirmed dead, five have been hospitalized and approximately 150 displaced people have sought refuge in churches. The majority of victims were women, children and the elderly. Reports also indicate that around 19 gunmen were later killed and one was taken alive during an exchange of fire with the Joint Task Force (JTF).

A mass burial was hastily organized the next day, and as mourners proceeded to the site they are reported to have discovered the burnt remains of around 50 more victims who had fled from the villages to shelter in a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) church in Matse Village, Riyom Local Government Area (LGA). Later, the mourners themselves were ambushed in the armed attack which claimed the lives of Senator Gyang Dalyop Datong, and Honorable Gyang James Fulani amongst others, and from which a member of the House of Representatives, Honorable Simon Madwakom, narrowly escaped.

There are conflicting reports indicating the two politicians either died of gunshot wounds or from shock. Following their deaths, angry youths took to the streets, mounting roadblocks in the area. Local people had allegedly reported the existence of a camp belonging to Fulani militants responsible for village raids, but say no action was taken by the security services.

In a comment to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), the Anglican Archbishop of Jos, the Most Reverend Benjamin Kwashi condemned the "detestable" attack on funeral goers and expressed anxiety for the future if the targeting of villages continues unchecked.

"This kind of unprovoked, deliberate attempt to overrun a population cannot succeed in the long run, whether or not the government takes action to stem it. Unfortunately, there is now an army of jobless young people aged 20 and under, who no longer attend church and for whom countering the violence is now a matter of survival. They do not listen to what you say, but watch what you do. They are seeing Boko Haram succeed using violent methods and if we are not careful, they themselves will soon be adopting Boko Haram's methods. We urgently need to engage them and provide direction. The only legacy we should leave for them is the legacy of working for peace."

The latest estimates of the weekend's death toll currently stand at 104, including the dead militants.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We extend our heartfelt condolences to the victims of these horrific attacks. The raids were systematic and organized, and eyewitnesses report that the gunmen were

heavily armed and well equipped. We urge the federal government to investigate every avenue of inquiry to identify the perpetrators of this crime, their sponsors and training camps, and to end these appalling raids, which appear to have continued unabated since 2010. A curfew is effective in the short term, but longer term security arrangements have to be undertaken to protect innocent civilians and to forestall the very real possibility of people taking the law into their own hands."