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NIGERIA | Upsurge of Violence in Northern, Central States

Northern and Central Nigerian states have seen an upsurge of violence in recent weeks. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has received eyewitness reports that the violence that broke out May 3 in Taraba State, during the burial procession of a high ranking chief in Northern Nigeria, was between local Muslims and Jukun traditionalists rather than Christians and Muslims.

Eye-witnesses to the violence on May 3 in the ancient city of Wukari, during the burial procession of Abe Ashumate from the Jukun, tribe have described it as a fight between local Fulanis and Jukun traditionalists.

In accordance with Jukun tradition, the bodies of high-ranking chiefs must be carried around the city prior to interment. Mourners attending the burial of Abe Ashumate allege that fighting broke out after members of the predominantly Muslim Fulani tribe blocked the route to the burial ground and stoned funeral goers, stating that the only permissible gathering was for the Jumat prayers.

Police moved in to quell the violence, reportedly arresting over 30 suspected rioters, and the state government instituted an on-going 24-hour curfew to prevent violence spreading into neighboring towns. While the police claim 39 people were killed, residents insist the figure is closer to 100, with 30 more injured.

According to eyewitnesses who spoke to CSW Nigeria, some of the victims were beheaded, including a pregnant woman whose legs were also cut off, and the private parts of others were removed. Around 70 homes and shops were destroyed in the violence, along with vehicles and other assets. Local sources estimate the total cost of the damage at over \$4 million.

Other states have also witnessed violence. On May 4, in Ngamdu, a town on the border between Borno and Yobe States, suspected Boko Haram members armed with guns, knives and machetes reportedly attacked the homes of two Muslim clerics who were critical of the sect,

tying them up before slitting their throats. Two other local men were also killed in a similar manner.

In Plateau State, a man from the Berom tribe was killed and beheaded by gunmen who invaded Gyel in Jos South Local Government Area (LGA) on May 5. On the same day, gunmen attacked an EYN (Brethren) Church in Jilang Village in Maiha LGA, Adamawa State killing 10 people and injuring 12 before attacking the market square, where six people were killed and three injured. Meanwhile, armed men shot and killed a security guard at the Government Secondary School (GSS) in Fadan Kaje, southern Kaduna State, fleeing in a car before security men arrived at the scene. Also on May 5, four Yoruba traders from Bodija Market in Ibadan City, southern Nigeria, who had gone to Borno State to purchase millet products, were murdered by gunmen who intercepted the commercial bus in which they were travelling and singled them out on account of their ethnicity. News of the deaths raised tensions in Bodija Market. The market was temporarily closed, and troops were deployed to strategic locations within the market.

During the early hours of May 7, Bama Town, in Borno State, was stormed by around 200 militants disguised in army uniforms, armed with machineguns and rocket-propelled grenades. They were travelling in a convoy of buses and trucks and launched coordinated attacks on the local police station, army barracks, magistrate's court and prison. Reportedly killed were 22 policemen, 14 prison officials, 13 sect members, three children, two soldiers and one woman, and 105 prisoners were freed. On May 8, Fulani herdsmen attacked Agatu LGA in Benue State, killing several people, including women and children. Around 20 policemen were killed in Assakio Village, Nasarawa State, by a cult known as Ombatse (the time has come).

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The reports of escalating violence coming in from Northern and Central Nigeria are deeply worrying. Tackling this issue effectively will require a comprehensive and unified effort by state governments and we urge them to work together to disrupt the movements of armed groups and prevent further loss of life. It is also worrying that, Boko Haram increasingly appears to be better equipped and coordinated. Since the security implications of this terrorist group extend beyond Nigeria's borders, CSW also calls for greater international co-operation and action to identify and disrupt the organization's funders, backers and training network."