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NIGERIA | Violence Erupts in Southern Kaduna

Violence erupted May 12 in Kachia Town, headquarters of Kachia Local Government Area (LGA) in southern Kaduna, despite the imposition of a 24-hour curfew May 11 by the Kaduna State government following clashes between Muslim and Christian youths.

On May 11, Muslim youths demolished Nassara Baptist Church after discovering part of the fence of an Eid prayer ground situated close to the church had been damaged and blamed this on the congregation. In retaliation, Christian youths set fire to two mosques. As violence raged, at least two homes and several shops were also set ablaze. According to a local source, the owner of one of the homes was an elderly lady who lost everything she owned apart from the clothes she was wearing.

A 24-hour curfew was immediately imposed on Kachia LGA in order to avoid the crisis spreading to other parts of the state. However, violence broke out again on May 12 among claims of several people being shot dead by soldiers, who were allegedly behaving in a partisan manner. Burnings and killings reportedly continued throughout the afternoon.

Predominantly Christian southern Kaduna has been prone to episodic violence since electoral violence broke out along religious lines following the 2011 presidential elections. For a time, this appeared to have eased. However, on April 2, 2014, a 24-hour curfew was imposed on Kafanchan Town after local youth reacted angrily to the discovery, by law enforcement agents, of weaponry in a truck carrying Fulani herdsman to the area.

In addition, villages in southern Kaduna experienced night attacks by Fulani gunmen on a fairly regular basis with local communities consistently complaining that, despite receiving timely distress calls and often being stationed close by, security forces generally arrived after an assault had ended. In several instances, fears were articulated of the security services being complicit in the violence. Distrust occasioned by perceived official complicity or inability to protect contributed to the emergence of retributive violence. As the 2015 elections loom, there are fears of renewed violence similar to 2011. One local source lamented, "We seem to be going back to the old times again."

Andy Dipper, Chief Operating Officer of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "CSW is deeply disturbed by the news emerging from Kachia. We urge the security forces to ensure they maintain and are seen to be maintaining an even-handed approach in addressing this issue. It is vital that justice is administered fairly and that those responsible for the destruction are held to account, regardless of creed. We call for cool heads to prevail and for local leaders to be proactive in calming their respective communities and in encouraging peace and reconciliation."