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NIGERIA | Gwoza Residents Await Assistance in the Hills

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed residents of Gwoza in northeastern Nigeria are still hiding in nearby hills after their town was overrun by militants from the Islamist terror group Boko Haram.

According to local sources, after being repulsed on an earlier occasion, Boko Haram regrouped and a large contingent of fighters dressed in military uniforms arrived in Gwoza on motorcycles, in trucks, and in up to 50 Toyota Hilux vans during the early hours of Aug. 6. They proceeded to overrun the town, killing residents and causing others to take to the hills. They also burned and looted homes and buildings after filling their trucks with food stocks for their base in the Sambisa Forest. According to survivors, over 100 residents may have lost their lives as the militants conducted door to door searches killing men, women and children.

CSW was told: "Corpses are still scattered around Gwoza. No one can go in and pick them. People are watching from the hills and can't come down to retrieve them. Survivors in the hills are trapped there. They can only come out if the military come."

The insurgents went on to attack, loot and burn the predominantly Christian town of Limankara, situated 14 miles from Gwoza. While an attack on Limankara's National Mobile Training School was eventually repelled and many insurgents were killed, it prevented the police from protecting the local community, resulting in an unknown number of deaths, including those of Pastor Musa Gaiyo of the Church of Christ in Nations, his father and three of his children. Sect members also stole 30 head of cattle from one of the victims. CSW was informed that detailed information "cannot be given right now because no one can go in to see what happened."

After attacking Limankara, the militants reportedly returned to Gwoza and continued to destroy the town as its residents look on from the hills. Gwoza Local Government Area has been under sustained attack for over a year. In an indication of the severity of the onslaught, CSW has learned that for the last three or four months, most residents have spent the night in the hills, descending in the morning to cook food and return with it to the hills. CSW was told: "Now that they have burned their houses and taken their foodstuffs, I don't know exactly how they are surviving."

Special Forces have been deployed to Borno State and reportedly reclaimed Damboa, Manga, Wanga, Delwa and Mustafari Villages from the insurgents.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Our thoughts and prayers are with those who lost loved ones in the appalling attacks on Gwoza and Limankara, and particularly with Pastor Gaiyo's family and congregation. It is deplorable that the residents of Gwoza have been terrorized for so many months, and are now internally displaced, having lost their homes and

livelihoods. The pain of watching from the hills as terrorists dismantle their lives and leave the bodies of loved ones exposed to the elements is unimaginable. While we applaud the reported advances by Special Forces, we urge state and federal authorities to send assistance to the people of Gwoza before they succumb to current privations. These people have lost everything and must be compensated adequately so they can begin to rebuild their lives.”