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NIGERIA | Peaceful Protest Calls for End to Killings

A peaceful march in the Plateau State capital Jos on Aug. 31 was the latest in a week of protests calling for action to end the daily killings of local villagers by Fulani gunmen.

Protestors at the march in Jos, organized by the Plateau Intelligentsia group, assembled at the Old Airport Junction before marching to the Plateau State House of Assembly, where they were received by the speaker, Mr. Peter Azi.

Protest organizer Dr. Daniel Meshak revealed that four youths were ambushed and killed at Kura Falls in Barkin Ladi Council while travelling to Jos to take part in the protest. He called on Nigeria's Federal Government to "prioritize the security situation on the Plateau" and "resettle, rehabilitate and compensate the victims of the attacks in a similar fashion it plans for victims of terror attacks in the North East." Marchers also protested outside Government House, where they were received by the Governor of Plateau State.

Addressing Monday's march, the Anglican Archbishop of Jos, Rt. Rev. Dr. Benjamin Kwashi said it was "sad to note that most victims of the attacks are harmless children, some infants, women and youth." The Archbishop also appealed to the Buhari administration for effective intervention to end the killings, adding that "attention should not be concentrated only at the north east alone; people are being killed here in Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa and Kaduna."

On Aug. 24, the Plateau Speaks group organized five days of protest at the Unity Fountain in Abuja, coinciding with the visit of United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, who received a petition detailing the plight of the targeted communities. The event was attended by several key politicians, religious leaders and members of other NGOs, including the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) movement and Minority Nigeria, who offered prayers, expressed solidarity and issued calls for effective intervention from the Federal Government. Plateau Speaks also included a candlelight procession in memory of victims.

The Plateau State Association-UK is planning to hold a protest outside the Nigerian High Commission in London on Sept. 4.

Since President Buhari's inauguration in May, at least 500 people in five states have died in attacks attributed to Fulani gunmen, with over half of these deaths occurring in Plateau State. During a July 14 meeting with the Police Commissioner, a delegation of church leaders revealed over 264 people were murdered and many more displaced in attacks on communities in Riyom and Barkin Ladi. Entire families have been wiped out in some instances, with attacks occurring daily on homes, in fields and on roads. Farms are looted, homes burnt, grain stores destroyed and crops cut down, depriving survivors of shelter, sustenance and income.

On Aug. 31, Minority Nigeria reported that three men and two women from Tanti in Bokokos Local Government Area (LGA) were shot dead and mutilated on their way to Mai Katako Market, in an attack that left a three-month-old baby needing hospital treatment for a bullet wound.

In late August, the Defence Headquarters announced the reorganization and upgrading of the Special Task Force in Plateau State, which was renamed "Operation Safe Haven."

Andy Dipper, Chief Operating Officer of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "The violence committed by Fulani gunmen must be addressed in tandem with that of Boko Haram, especially given indications of a possible link between the two groups in Plateau State with the reported discovery of a training camp in Riyom LGA last year. In addition, victims must receive compensation and be given every assistance to rebuild their lives. The seeming impunity with which these gunmen continue to murder villagers fuels retributive violence and contributes to a dangerous surge in lawlessness. To offset the continuing deterioration in rule of law, we call once again for the formulation of a holistic security strategy that encompasses every crisis-affected state, that addresses both sources of violence and secures justice for all victims as a matter of urgency."