

HART is a UK-based charity that works closely with local partners in Nigeria's Plateau, Bauchi and Kano states. Our findings are based on first-hand accounts of ongoing human rights violations in northern and central-belt states and reflect the urgent priorities of local partners.

1. Summary of recommendations

1.1 We welcome that the Integrated Review identifies Nigeria as a priority partner for the UK.

1.2 We welcome the commitment to identify areas where the UK can support the Armed Forces of Nigeria and regional partners in their efforts to bring stability to the region, including those deployed with the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram. We hope that this commitment will extend to combating the escalation of attacks by other Islamist extremist groups, including Islamist Fulani militia,¹ whose activities are described in two recent reports: *'Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?'*, by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief; and *'Nigeria's Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community'*, by the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON) and the International Organisation for Peacebuilding and Social Justice (PSJ).

1.3 In light of escalating violence and consequent mass displacement, we urge the UK to allocate humanitarian aid to the Middle Belt, in addition to UK aid to the north-east.

1.4 We are deeply concerned that those responsible for ongoing atrocities – including killings, physical violence, rape and sexual violence, abductions, forced conversions, forced marriage, child marriage and many more, as perpetrated by Boko Haram, ISIL-affiliated groups, Islamist Fulani militia and bandits active in the country – continue to enjoy impunity, in addition to reports that elements of the Nigerian Government may be complicit in violence. Many Muslims who refuse to adopt the Islamist ideology of the militants have also been killed.

1.5 We urge the UK government to apply pressure on the Nigerian Government to ensure accountability for atrocities committed by government and non-government parties in Eastern Nigeria; to seek to address the causes of the increasing violence in the region; and to listen to the aspirations and concerns of regional groups.

1.6 We also urge the UK Government to formulate international interventions that both pressure and assist the Government of Nigeria to fulfil its primary mandate of safeguarding lives and properties. This should include assistance to Nigerian law enforcement mechanisms and courts with capacity building to ensure that they can effectively investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of atrocities.

2. Urgent considerations re. the Middle Belt

2.1 Over £2 billion of UK bilateral aid was given to Nigeria between 2011 and 2018, an equivalent of £800,000 every day. We have expressed concerns previously over how the funds are spent; and how it could be better spent – especially in relation to the protection of those most at risk of attack; requiring medical help for those suffering from injuries as well as PTSD and the need to bring perpetrators to justice.

2.2. Among our primary concerns is that the UK does not provide humanitarian assistance to the Middle Belt.

2.3 The Middle Belt is one of Nigeria's worst-affected regions of Islamist-related violence often characterised as the 'farmer-herder conflict', where Islamist Fulani militia pursue an aggressive and strategic land-grabbing policy, attacking rural villages, forcing villagers off their lands and settling in their place.

2.4 The farmer-herder conflict is, according to World Watch Monitor “the country’s gravest security challenge.”

2.5 International Crisis Group estimated in July 2018 that more than 300,000 people have been displaced as a result of the so-called farmer-herder conflict. The violence has claimed the lives of six times more people than the conflict with Boko Haram. Its geographical footprint is also larger, with conflict manifesting in more States.

2.6 HART partners in Nigeria are impacted directly by the Islamist jihadists. Our 2018 Visit Report, entitled ‘Hidden Atrocities: The Escalating Persecution of Christians in Northern and Central Nigeria’ noted that in Nasarawa State alone, in the first six months of 2018, 314 villages were attacked, 404 people were killed, over 24,000 homes and 539 churches destroyed, and over 242,000 persons were displaced. In Plateau State, between mid-2015 and mid-2018, 54 communities were destroyed and another 123 came under sustained attack. The number of deaths in Plateau State in 2018 were estimated at 2,000.

2.7 On 4 July 2018, the Nigerian House of Representatives declared killings in Plateau State to be a genocide.

2.8 Mediciens Sans Frontiers reported in 2020: “Nigeria’s ‘middle belt’ states, Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba, host the largest numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country, outside of the northeast region. Most people have been uprooted by the so-called ‘farmer-herdsmen’ conflict.”¹ At least 160,000 displaced people are scattered across Benue state, according to 2019 estimates, and these figures do not include the many thousands who have been further displaced in 2020 and 2021²

2.9 In April 2021, our in-country partner, Revd Canon Hassan John, said: “In the first two weeks of April, there were more than 60 abductions and 18 killings in one community alone. As attacks by Boko Haram and radical Islamist Fulani herdsmen continue to grow in frequency, most communities are starting to form their own vigilante groups to protect themselves. The people have lost hope in the government and feel that if they do not defend themselves, they will be killed. Every other day/night, a village in the middle-belt region is attacked. Boko Haram continues to gain more ground and abductions have become the fastest way to make a lot of money. In this year alone, more than a billion naira has been given as ransom.”

3. Increasing violence in Eastern Nigeria

3.1 The situation in eastern Nigeria is increasingly dangerous with anarchy and armed banditry prevailing in some areas. A colleague in Nigeria wrote last week: *“People can’t move between villages or in the streets in the evenings without being attacked; robbed or kidnapped. It is unclear whether the insecurity is due to Fulani attacks, IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) or the army’s extrajudicial killings or a combination of all three. The Nigerian army seem to be trying to use both air power and ground forces to destroy the Biafran group. This may simply escalate into another deadly crisis for innocent civilians in the region. The IPOB agitation is a political move but the Nigerian government believes military force will dissipate the agitation and that is a terrible mistake. The army attacks, coupled by Fulani Herdsmen militia attacks on villages and communities will certainly result in many more people and possibly youths joining the Biafra militia.”*

3.2 Since January 2021, hundreds of people have been abducted and/or killed by Nigerian security forces. Intersociety reports: *“These abductions, killings, maiming, torture and disappearances by military and police also bear stark evidence of persecution, hate and crude policing and soldiering as 99% of the victims cutting across the three heinous crimes are members of Christian faith with most of them belonging to Igbo Ethnic Nationality. Intersociety did not find any evidence showing that such*

violent clampdowns are also extended to members of Fulani Muslim population resident in the East whose jihadist elements have since 2016 killed over 400 rural and urban Igbo Christians and their neighbours and forcefully occupied over 500 of their farmlands, bushes and forests. Further checks also indicated that the non-indigenous Muslim population in the regions are pampered and treated sacredly by the drafted Muslim dominated and controlled security heads.”ⁱⁱ

4. Conclusion

4.1 In the Committee’s final report, we urge you to prioritise tackling extreme poverty and protecting human rights. In particular, we recommend for immediate action the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Middle Belt, in addition to UK aid that has been allocated to the north-east.

4.2 We share widespread concerns that, if the current levels of violence, instability and displacement continue, this could lead to the break-up of Nigeria and the creation of an unstable crisis in which terrorism (that already afflicts the Lake Chad area) could expand. This would have grave ramifications for the continent and wider international community.

ⁱ We recognise the important distinction between the Fulani in general (a diverse group of millions of people with hundreds of clans) and the sub-group of radicalised Fulani who carry out attacks. The term ‘Fulani militia’ is used to describe well-armed individuals of Fulani ethnicity who launch attacks in the Middle Belt (against predominantly-Christian communities), as distinct from Fulani bandits in the north-west (who mainly attack Hausa Muslim communities) and Fulani in the north (many of whom are victims of attacks by Boko Haram).

ⁱⁱ ‘*Eastern Nigeria: Soldiers, Police, Others Abducted 2000 Persons, Disappeared 500 & Extra-Judicially Killed 140 Since Jan 2021*’ Intersociety. Onitsha-Nigeria, 26th May 2021