

DATE BACK JUNE 2018

Statement by church leaders and Christian Association of Nigeria in Plateau State and Seven years later nothing has changed

The renewed attacks on Christian communities and churches across Nigeria and particularly in the middle belt of the country where over 6000 persons mostly children, women and the aged have been maimed and killed in night raids by armed Fulani herdsmen have necessitated our outcry through this medium with a view to call on those in government authority, especially the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, to stop this senseless and blood shedding in the land and avoid a state of complete anarchy where the people are forced to defend themselves.

We also wish to appeal to the international community, particularly the United Nations, to intervene in the ongoing Fulani herdsmen pogrom in the country to avert unpleasant consequences that may spill over into other countries and continents. We are particularly worried at the widespread insecurity in the country where wanton attacks and killings by armed Fulani herdsmen, bandits and terrorists have been taking place on a daily basis in our communities unchallenged despite huge investments in the security agencies. The perpetrators are being deliberately allowed to go scot free. It is even more worrisome that these huge numbers of over 6000 deaths in 2018 alone have been recorded in various attacks, especially in the northern and middle belt states of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa, Kaduna, Kwara, Borno, Zamfara and other states when the country is not in a state of war.

The worst that have shocked the world is the recent genocide and blood bath in Barkin Ladi, parts of Bokkos, Riyom and Bassa Local Government Areas of Plateau state. There is no doubt that the sole purpose of these attacks is aimed at ethnic cleansing, land grabbing and forceful ejection of the Christian natives from their ancestral land and heritage. The attacks by the so-called herdsmen across the local areas listed in 11 villages of Plateau state where over 200 persons were brutally killed and our churches destroyed without any intervention from security agencies in spite of several distress calls made to them, further buttresses our concern that the security architecture of the land and the handlers have woefully failed. To further show the incompetency of the security agencies and deliberate attempt to hide the facts of the massacre that took place, the police could not and have not been able to determine the exact number of the casualties. They keep navigating from 11, 86 and 100 figures which in actual sense has a death toll figure so far of 238. What is happening in Plateau state and other select states in Nigeria is pure genocide and must be stopped

immediately.

We strongly also disagree with the federal government's attempt to politicize the attacks and divert people's attention from government glaring failures and national shame by blaming it as the handiworks of desperate opposition politicians. We reject the narrative that the attacks on Christian communities across the country as "farmers/herdsmen clash". The federal government has been so immersed in this false propaganda and deceit while forcefully pushing the policy idea of establishing cattle ranches/colonies on the ancestral farming lands of the attacked communities for the Fulani herdsmen as the only solution to the problem. How can it be a clash when one group is persistently attacking, killing, maiming, destroying; and the other group is persistently being killed, maimed and their places of worship destroyed?



How can it be a clash when the herdsmen are hunting farmers in their own villages/communities and farmers are running for their lives? How can it be a clash when the herdsmen are the predators and the inhabitant/indigenous farmers are the prey? Until we call a disease by its real name and causatives, it would be difficult to properly diagnose the disease for the right curative medications.

Despite efforts by the states of Benue and Taraba to enact laws for the control of open grazing in accordance with the constitution, we have seen the herdsmen with the support of federal government and security agencies abuse these laws as it continues to attack and destroy communities in the states.

We note with disappointment, the unfortunate comments of the Minister of Defense, Monsur Dan Ali and the Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Idris against the state laws on open grazing as clear support for the herdsmen violent inversion on Christian communities. We view the recent arrest and quick convictions to death of five Christian youths defending their communities against herdsmen attacks Demsa, in Adamawa State as part of the conspiracy and support by the government.

Unfortunately, no armed herdsmen have ever been arrested for prosecution even when they are caught in the act. The attempt by the federal government to create cattle ranches across the country for the murderous herdsmen against the people's resistance is an open call to anarchy by the government, indicating that there might be other ulterior motives (like taking over the inhabitants' ancestral farming land) for the call to establish these ranches with public funds which ordinarily should have been private businesses by the cattle owners. While we appreciate the personal visit of the President, Muhammadu Buhari and his Vice, Yemi Osinbajo to Plateau state to commiserate with the people, we urge the federal government to go beyond the cosmetics of such political visit to fish out the perpetrators of these attacks and make them pay for their crimes against humanity. The usual excuse and claims in all the areas affected by these violence by the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Associations, MACBAN, the herdsmen body, that the attacks was a retaliation for the cattle rustled by the natives can no longer be accepted. It is popular knowledge that it is not easy to handle herds of cows if one is not used to it. It is also well known to the security agencies that most cases of rustled cattle are by the herdsmen themselves who later turn around to accuse their host communities.

It is as a result of the forgoing that we hereby make the following demands:

1. That the heads of security agencies in the country is skewed to one religion and region of the country and have consistently shown grave bias and incompetency in tackling the wide insecurity challenges in the country and should be reconstituted to reflect the federal character of our country to earn the required trust, confidence and support of the general populace.
2. All communities ravaged by the herdsmen violence should be rebuilt and adequate security put in place to enable displaced persons return to their homes and means of livelihood.
3. The federal government should roll out a robust advocacy programme to enlighten the nomadic herders on modern cattle rearing against open grazing and roaming across state and national boundaries
4. The federal government should desist from any attempt to take people's ancestral farmland for the establishment of cattle ranches across the country. As a private business, cattle owners should rather be encouraged to buy land and build their ranches like every other private investor.



5. While the federal government under the current administration is celebrating an over exaggerated agricultural revolution, most farmers can no longer go to their farms due to the attacks of herdsmen. We therefore urge the government to reconcile its priority by providing the necessary safety for the farmers to go on with their farming activities.

6. We demand that all tiers of government should invest more on human capital development instead of focusing on capital spending in a society ravaged by unprecedented insecurity, crime, loss of jobs, poverty, hunger and squalor. This is even more urgent against the backdrop of the recent IMF report which reveals that Nigeria with over 180 million populations now has the highest global

poverty rate of 74 percent overtaking India of over a billion populations.

It would be recalled that it is under this administration that thousands of Nigerians left the shores of this country in search of jobs abroad, several of whom were turned into slaves and many killed in various bizarre circumstances.

7. We demand that the government should immediately apprehend and prosecute leadership of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, MACBAN for not only taking responsibility for the various attacks but justifying the killings as retaliation over cattle rustled by unknown persons. On the contrary, what we have seen is the pampering of these killer groups who rather than being apprehended by the security agencies for justice to take its course are being paid and pacified, giving the impression that they are above the laws of the land.

8. We observe the continuous abduction of under aged Christian girls by Muslim youths who are forcefully converted to Islam and taken in for marriage without the consent of their parents. We wish to state that this does not only violate the fundamental human right of the girls but is also a call to anarchy when such actions are retaliated by Christian youths. This is even more worrisome as such acts are supported by several highly placed clerics and Emirs. We hereby call on the federal government to stem this tide in order to ensure inter-religious harmony in the country.

9. We also note the lukewarm attitude in the government's handling of negotiations for the release of the abducted Chibok school girls and of Leah Sharibu. We therefore reiterate our demand that the federal government should deploy more efforts to ensure the release of the girls without further delay.

Signed Rev. Dr. Soja Bewarang