



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

COUNTRY REPORT



Nigeria at the crossroads

PONTIFICAL
FOUNDATION



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Pontifical Foundation

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Unless otherwise stated, the information in this document has been compiled using information obtained during research trips and interviews with local partners over the past 6 years.

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COUNTRY REPORT

» Nigeria at the crossroads



Area

923,768 Km²

Flag



Population

206 million

Languages: English (official).

Others: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, Ibibio, Tiv, Birom, Kanuri and over 500 additional indigenous languages

Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

Abuja

Economical Capital

Lagos

Political system

Federal presidential republic



Photo: Emmanuel Ikwuegbu | Unsplash

1. General overview

- Nigeria is located in western Africa and borders Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.
- The name Nigeria was taken from the Niger River that runs through the country.
- The flag: Three equal vertical bands of green, white, and green; the color green represents the forests and natural wealth of the country, white symbolizes peace and unity.
- Ruled by the British since 1914, Nigeria attained independence in 1960. The adoption of a new constitution in 1999 completed a peaceful transition to civilian rule.
- It is Africa's most populous country (206 million). The highest density areas are in the south and south-west. The major urban areas by population were estimated in 2021 to be Lagos (14.862 million), Kano (4.103 million), Ibadan (3.649 million), Abuja (3.464 million), Port Harcourt (3.171 million) and Benin City (1.782 million).
- Nigeria is estimated to have over 250 ethnic groups: Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Berberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, other 24.9% (2018 est.)
- President: Muhammadu Buhari (born December 1942). A retired Nigerian Army major general, Buhari was formerly Head of State of Nigeria from 31 December 1983 to 27 August 1985, after taking power in a military coup d'état.

1.1. Short contemporary history timeline

1861

British expansion in the region started with the annexation of Lagos

1885

Britain's claims to rule the Niger Basin were acknowledged during the Berlin Conference

1906

The British formed the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria

1914

The territories in the south were united to the protectorate of Northern Nigeria, giving birth to that we now know as "Nigeria"

1960 1967-1970

Independence
Biafra war

1999

Adoption of a new constitution in 1999 and transition to a peaceful civil system

1.2. Political situation

After independence, Nigeria had six coups (1966, 1967, 1975, 1983, 1985 and 1993), followed by military rule and short periods of civilian rule as a republic. Following these decades of mostly military rule, Nigeria has been enjoying the longest period of civilian rule in its history, having a multiparty democracy since 1999. It is a federation of 36 autonomous states and the Federal Capital Territory. The executive wing of government is controlled by the All-Progressives Congress party (APC), which holds majority seats in the Senate and House of Representatives in parliament, as well in most of the States.

It has a bicameral legislature comprising a 109-member Senate and a 360-member House of Representatives. Currently there are 18 registered political parties.

Political parties alternate candidates for elected office on an “ethno-regional” basis, also referred to as the Federal Quota System. The system was devised in response to fears of marginalization and ethnic domination in education and government. However, this system has a good number of critics who complain of a discriminatory effect. Perceived violations of these arrangements have often led to conflict.

President Muhammadu Buhari will complete his second term in office on May 29th, 2023. General Elections to elect a new Presi-

dent, Federal and State Legislators and Governors are scheduled for February 2023.

The two strongest candidates to succeed him are Bola Tinubu, ex-governor of Lagos, a Muslim and a member of Buhari’s All Progressives Congress (APC) party; and Atiku Abubakar, a Muslim from the north, former vice president of the opposition PDP (People’s Democratic Party).

Until now, the most important parties had always presented a ticket that represented the two main religions of the country. If the president was a Christian, the vice president would be a Muslim, and vice versa. But for the first time, the All-Progressives Congress presented Muslim-Muslim ticket: the presidential candidacy of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and his running mate Kashim Shetima, both Muslims. Many Nigerians criticized the bias and insensitivity towards the pluralistic Nigerian society. The Muslim-Muslim ticket is widely seen as an indicator of increasing religious discrimination and marginalization in the country.

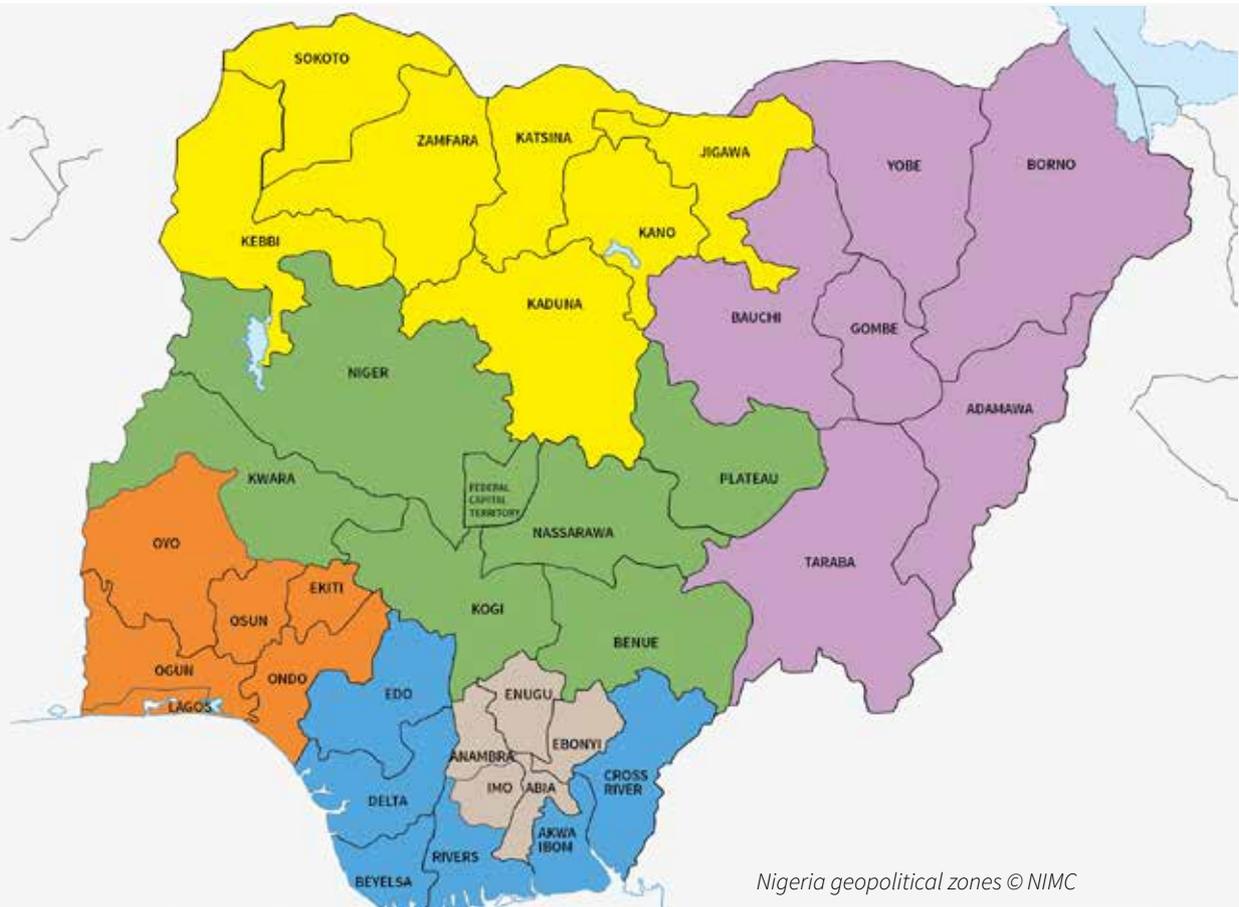
In this context a third strong candidate has emerged, Peter Obi of the Labor Party, popular with young people, Christians and southerners.

Elections often serve as flashpoints for violence as political office at all tiers of government yields access to oil earnings and other state resources.

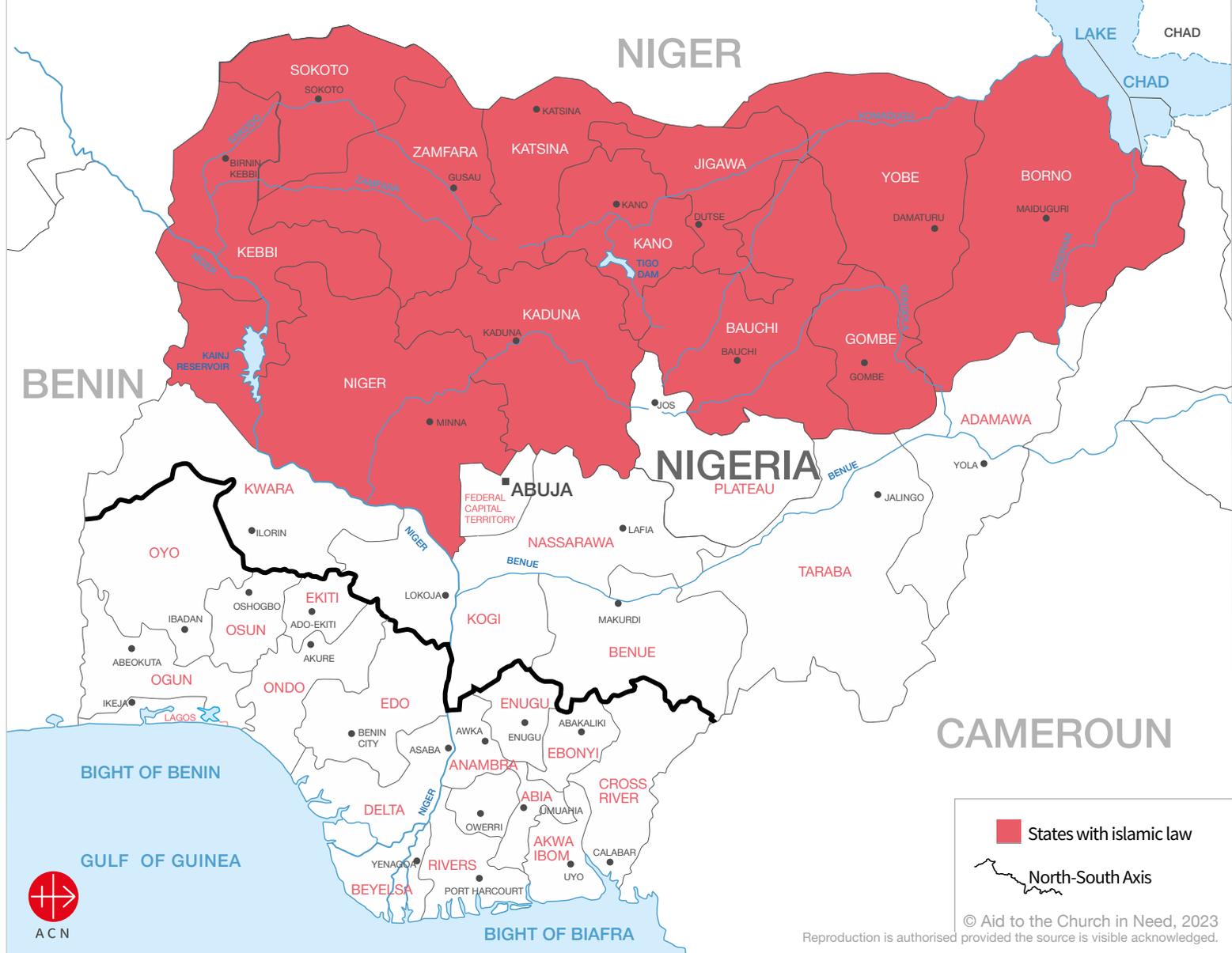
Nigeria geopolitical zones

6 geopolitical zones > 36 states

- North-Central** (7 states): Benue, FCT, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, and Plateau
- North-East** (6 states): Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe
- North-West** (7 states): Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara
- South-East** (5 states): Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo
- South-South** (6 states): Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers
- South-West** (6 states): Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Lagos.



Nigeria geopolitical zones © NIMC



1.3. The North-South Axis

Nigeria is by no means a homogeneous country. Over 250 ethnic groups and indigenous languages express the diversity and richness of the country.

To understand the situation in the country it is very important to speak about a prevailing international typecasting between the north and the south of the country. Some Nigerians speak from a position of “geographical ignorance” between both parts¹. Many South Nigerians believe that there are no Christians in the North, even if states like Gombe or Kaduna have a Christian population of almost 50% and in Borno, the cradle of Boko Haram, 30% of the population is Christian.

The major ethnic groups are also geographically divided: the Hausa, the Fulani and the Kanuri are dominant in the north and Yoruba, Igbo and Tiv in the south.

Before the arrival of British power, north, south, west, and east had different idiosyncrasies and lived their own ethnic, political and religious realities. The first step of British expansion in the

region was the annexation of Lagos in 1861. In 1885, at the Berlin Conference, Britain claimed rights to the Niger Basin. In 1906 the British amalgamated the Lagos Colony and Protectorate with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form the new Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1914 these territories in the south were united with the protectorate of Northern Nigeria, giving birth to the geo-political unit that we now know as Nigeria. However, the territories maintained their regional authorities, divided after 1914 into three local units. The announcement of their dissolution by the military government after the first coup in 1966 triggered violent reactions in the north against southerners who had settled among them. This was one of the factors that contributed to the outbreak of the civil war.

The antagonism between the north and the south suffered a serious resurgence during the restoration of Sharia in 12 of the 20 northern states in 2000 and has increased in recent years, fueled by the conflicts described in chapter 3 of this report.

It should be mentioned that “north” and “south” do not always match the perception that an observer would see on a map.

Considering the division into states from the political and administrative angle, Adawama or Taraba are two states of the North-East Region, even if to an observer they would be clearly in the center. Also, Abuja, the capital, is considered part of the north of the country.

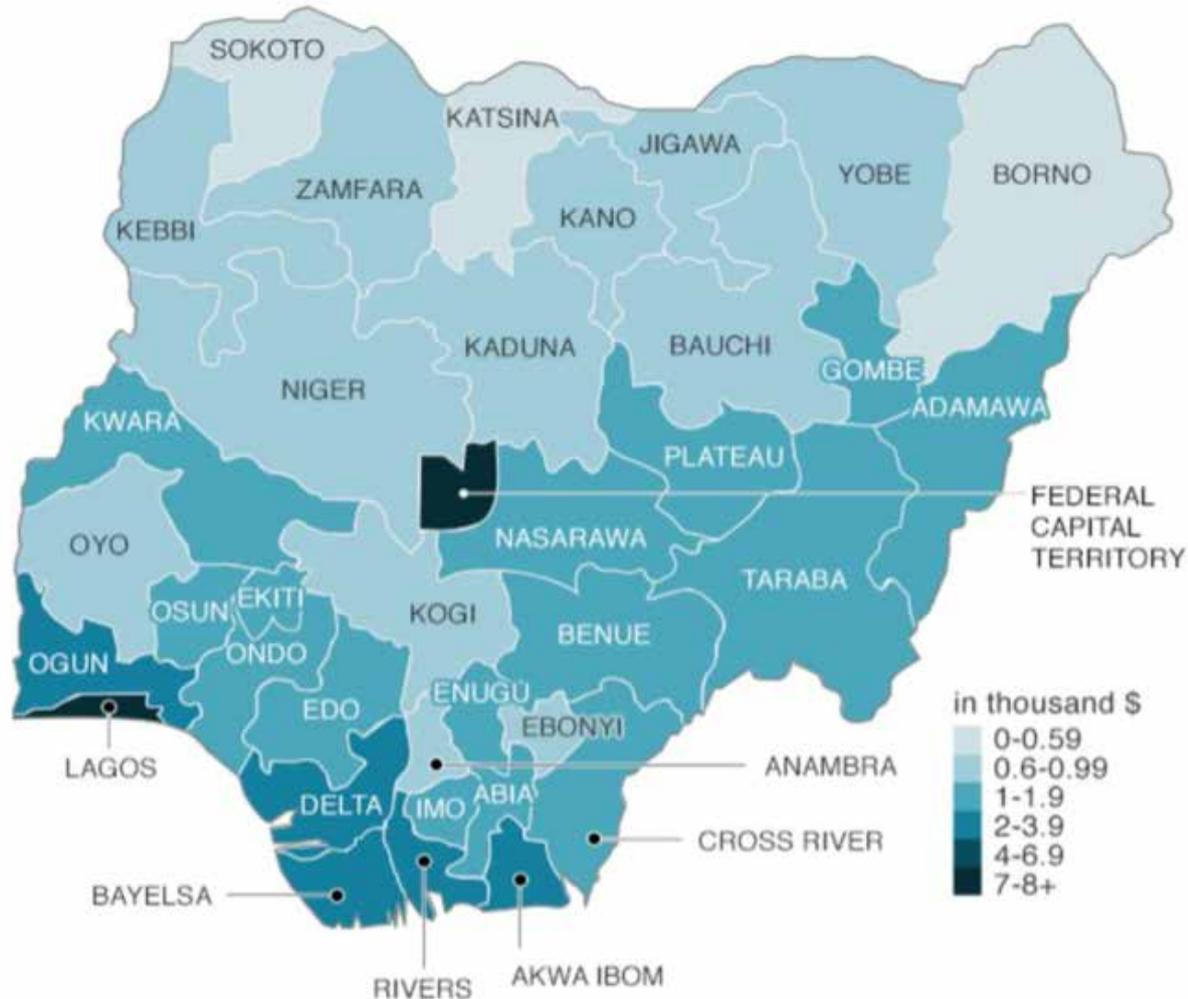
Perhaps due to this mismatch with reality, there is a very important geographical term often used by the media: Nigeria's Middle Belt, which refers to the area that bisects the country from east to west, along the center, forming a transition zone between northern and southern Nigeria. It includes most of the North-Central Region and the southern half of the North-Eastern Region. Characterized by a large mix of ethnicities – 50 to 100 separate languages and ethnic groups – it is a meeting point between two worlds and the scene of frequent incidents in our days.

130 million Nigerians live below the poverty line. The south is richer, has more universities, and is better educated. The south also includes the oil reservoir and the financial capital, Lagos. The political center is in the north, where 46% of the population lives, while 53% live in the south. Population density is higher in the south, though the surface is smaller.

Southerners often complain about resource distribution, which is subjected to centralization by the central power. Some places, like Delta State, are far less developed, even though they have oil reservoirs.

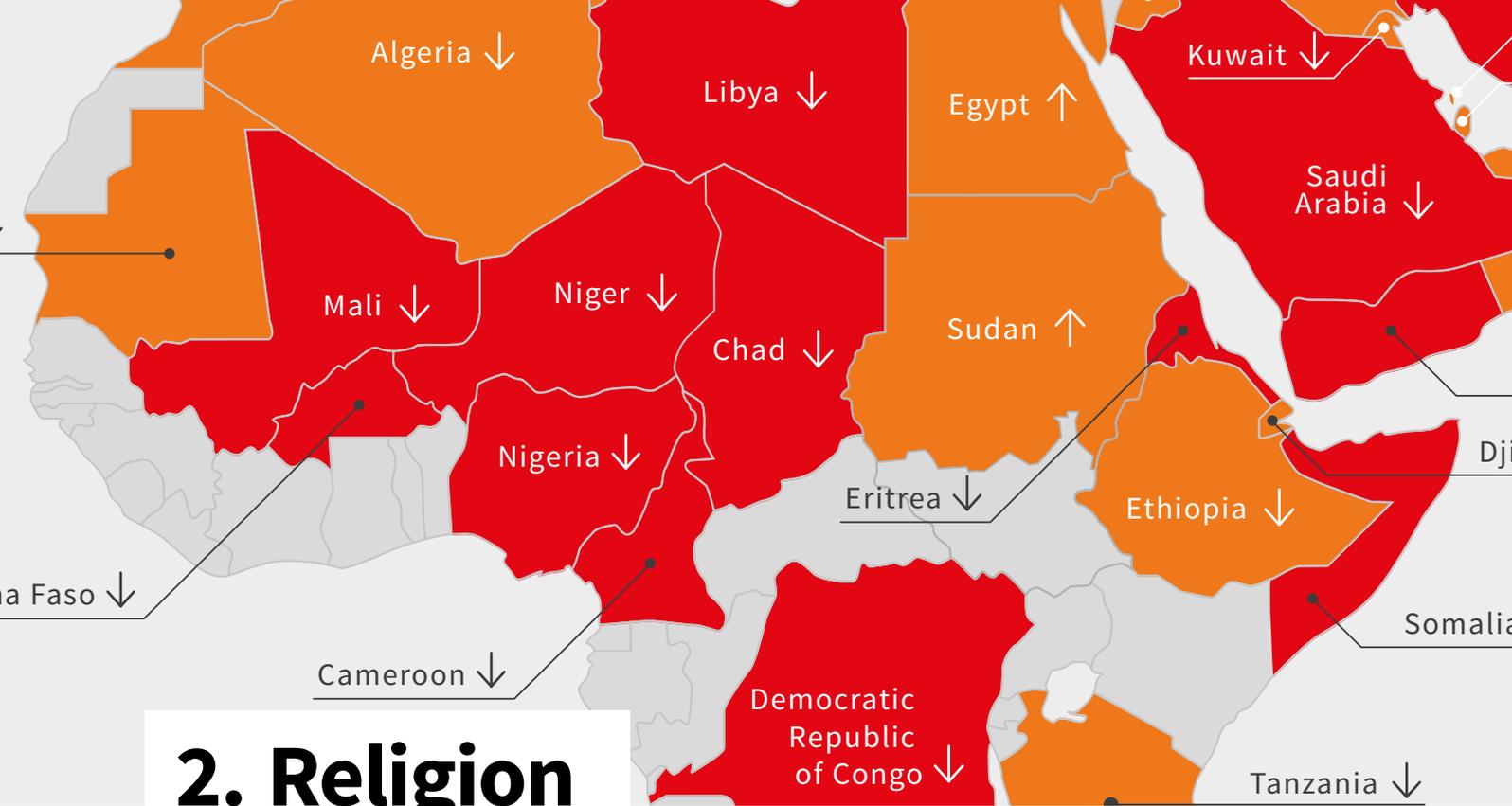
Figures and numbers of both religious and ethnic groups have often been manipulated for propaganda, as well as political and power conflicts.

Average annual income per person in \$



Source: Nigeria Bureau of Statistics





2. Religion

Christians make up around 46.2% of the population. Roman Catholicism is practiced by 12.4% (other sources speak of 14%) and other Christian beliefs by 33.8%. Islam is the religion of 45.8% of Nigerians. Most of them adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. The remaining population (7%) holds traditional religious beliefs. Christianity is the majority religion in the south, and Islam in the north.

2.1 Religious Freedom ³

Nigeria guarantees religious freedom. Under Article 15 of the Nigerian Constitution, no person may be discriminated against on grounds of his or her religious affiliation. Article 10 stipulates that neither Nigeria as a Federal Republic, nor any of its individual states, may adopt a state religion.

Beyond this, Article 38 (I) of the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of thought and religion, including the right to freely practice one's faith, propagate it through religious instruction, and convert to another faith. Article 38 (II) says that no one may be compelled to participate in religious instruction against his or her will if the instruction is not in accordance with that person's faith. This guarantee also extends to religious observances.

In the effort to promote social inclusion, Article 15 (3, c and d) of the Constitution places the state under an obligation to foster inter-religious marriages and to promote the establishment of associations and groups for members of different religions. Article 222 (e) also prohibits political parties from identifying with any particular religion or region.

Nigeria has a mixed legal system with four separate sources, namely English law, common law, customary law, and, in a number of states, Islamic law (Sharia). Pursuant to Article 275 of the Nigerian Constitution, states are entitled to empanel a Sharia Court of Appeal.

2.2. Sharia Law

Sharia is Islamic canonical law, based on the teachings of the Koran and the traditions of Mohammed (Hadith and Sunna), prescribing both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for lawbreaking.

Sharia Law is a system of duties and obligations that rule all facets of Muslim life, and includes personal and public behavior, the observance of religious life, but also family and business issues. Islamic laws are based on Sharia interpretations.

Islamic law emerged in Nigeria toward the beginning of the 19th century and remained applicable until the arrival of the British Colonial regime in Northern Nigeria in 1903. The British regime abolished Sharia. In October 1999 Gusau, the capital of Zamfara State, readopted Sharia-based legal codes which operate in parallel with secular courts. Prior to that, Sharia law in northern Nigeria was limited to civil matters and excluded criminal matters.

By the end of 2001, 11 other states had joined Zamfara and re-introduced 'full' Sharia. Many of these Sharia laws include heavy penalties for blasphemy, including death. In Kaduna and Niger, which are included in the 12 states, Sharia does not apply to the whole state.

African nations with Islamic law rarely use this as a basis for

their criminal code. But Nigerian Sharia courts do, even if serious punishments such as amputations and stoning to death are rarely imposed — and where they were imposed, have not been executed. Until January 2022, only one person, Sani Yakubu Rodi (Katsina State), has been executed since 12 Muslim-majority states embraced Sharia law. In 2020 an Islamic court in Nigeria’s Kano State sentenced Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a musician, to death for making a blasphemous statement against Muhammad, but in 2021 a retrial was ordered⁴.

Last year the horrific murder of Deborah Yakubo, a Christian student at the Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto, northern Nigeria, accused of blasphemy by fellow students, brought the discussion back to the fore. This act of violence did not even respect the norms for Islamic law and was simply a case of lynching and summary execution, but it reaffirms the fear of Christians in the north of radicalization of some Muslims.

According to ACN’s most recent Religious Freedom Report, Sharia law has deepened divisions in the country. When 12 states introduced Islamic law years ago, many Muslims reacted with enthusiasm, while Christians protested the decision. Ensuing riots claimed several thousand lives – of Christians as well as Muslims. Fr Atta Barkindo, director of the renowned Catholic Kukah Centre promoting interfaith dialogue, states: *“What Sharia law has done is to divide us more in this country.*

You go to communities; people have withdrawn into the womb of their religions.” According to Fr Barkindo it is urgent for Nigerians to discuss what their country should actually look like as a secular state, how it can define itself as a nation, and how Christians and Muslims can live together⁵.

12 states officially introduced Islamic law between 1999 and 2001:



Zamfara | Kano | Sokoto | Katsina | Bauchi | Borno | Jigawa | Kebbi | Yobe | Kaduna | Niger | Gombe



STORY

Deborah Samuel murdered for a text message

Deborah Samuel Yakubu was a student at the Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto, northern Nigeria. In May she was accused of having sent a blasphemous WhatsApp message about Mohammed during Ramadan, while the college was closed for holidays. When she returned to class, a group of students was waiting and attacked her, stoning her and then setting fire to her body. After two people were arrested for her murder, groups of rioters attacked Christian sites in different places in the state capital.

The Catholic bishop of Sokoto, Mgr. Matthew Hassan Kukah, a promoter of inter-religious dialogue in his diocese, spared no words in condemning the criminal act against Deborah. Bishop Kukah recalled that Christians have lived in peace with their Muslim neighbors in Sokoto for years, and asked those who were directly affected, and the Christian community of Sokoto, to keep calm and wait for justice to follow its course.



Original articles:

- <https://acninternational.org/nigeria-christian-student-stoned-and-burned-to-death/>
- <https://acninternational.org/anti-christian-violence-in-nigeria/>



2.3. Catholic Church in Nigeria

It is said that the majority of Christians live in the south, but dioceses like Jalingo, Jos and Benue, in north and central Nigeria, are majority Christian, and others, like Kaduna, Abuja and Nassarawa are estimated to be about half Christian. On the other hand Kwara, which is in the south, is only around 40% Christian.

The Yoruba area in the west has traditionally been Protestant and Anglican, whereas Igboland in the east has always been the area of greatest activity of the Catholic Church. Out of all Christians: 64% are protestant and 25% are Catholic. There are many small African Churches that broke off from Protestant denominations.

Apart from Benin and Warri, in the Niger Delta, which had come

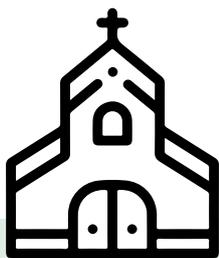
into contact with Christianity through the Portuguese in the 15th century, other regions only had contact with Christians in the 19th century.

The colonial British rulers established a regulation that Christians could not proselytize in the northern Muslim region, but small missionary activities were allowed to start up in the Middle Belt in the 1920s. Reading the history of the beginnings of the archdioceses in Kaduna, for example, one discovers a close link between the development of the railway and the arrival of the first priests, many of them Irish, in the north of the country.

The Catholic Church has done, and continues to do, immense work for inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue in the country. The bishops in the north, especially, are peacemakers and community builders.

Catholic Church at a glance

Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2020 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana)



CATHOLIC
POPULATION
14,82%

TOTAL POPULATION **206,175,000**
CATHOLICS **30,556,00**

Workforce for the Church's apostolate

70 BISHOPS	8,778 PRIESTS
53 DIOCESAN	7,162 DIOCESAN
20 TITULAR	1,616 RELIGIOUS

8,778 RELIGIOUS WOMEN (PROFESSED)	47 LAY WOMEN'S SECULAR INSTITUTES
683 RELIGIOUS MEN NOT PRIESTS	9 LAY MEN'S SECULAR INSTITUTES
6,555 SEMINARIANS STUDENTS OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY	1,948 LAY MISSIONARIES
	20,416 CATECHISTS

Catholic Church at a glance

Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2020 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana)

275 HOSPITALS

219 DISPENSARIES

53 ORPHANAGES

52 NURSERIES

615 MATRIMONIAL
ADVICE CENTERS

HOMES

46 FOR ELDERLY AND
HANDICAPPED PEOPLE

45 SPECIAL CENTERS
FOR SOCIAL EDUCATION

70 OTHER
INSTITUTIONS



1,832
KINDERGARDENS

1,940
PRIMARY OR ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS

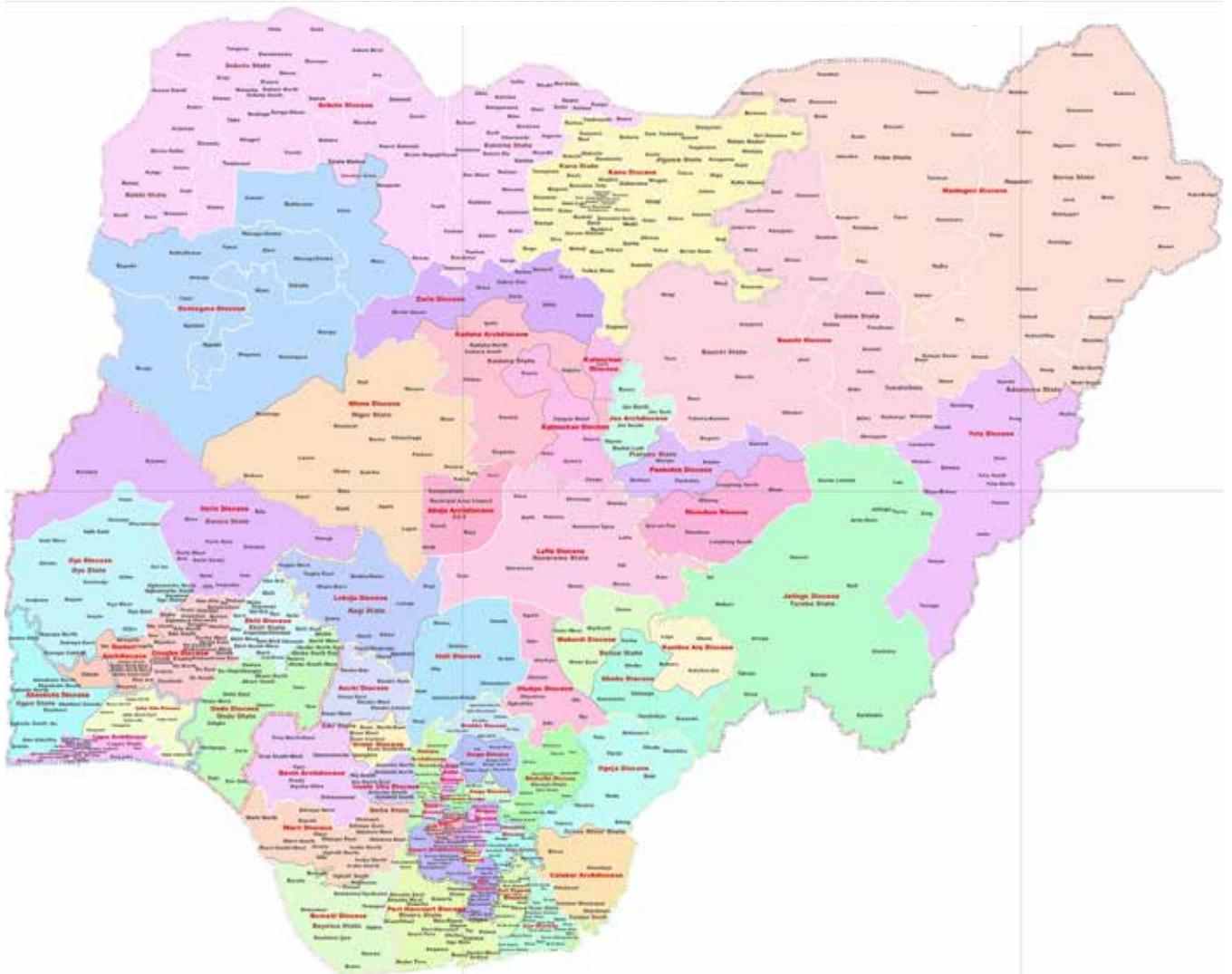
1,328
SECONDARY SCHOOLS
JUNIOR AND SENIOR



1,375

Catholic Ecclesiastical Provinces and Dioceses in Nigeria

Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) - 2022



Archdioceses and their correspondent depending dioceses in Nigeria:

Abuja: Gboko, Idah, Katsina-Ala, Lafia, Lokoja, Makurdi, Otukpo

Benin City: Auchi, Bomadi, Issele-Uku, Uromi, Warri

Calabar: Ikot Ekpene, Ogoja, Port Harcourt, Uyo

Ibadan: Ekiti, Ilorin, Ondo, Osogbo, Oyo

Jos: Bauchi, Jalingo, Maiduguri, Pankshin, Shendam, Wukari, Yola

Kaduna: Kafanchan, Kano, Kontagora, Minna, Sokoto, Zaria

Lagos: Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode

Onitsha: Abakaliki, Awgu, Awka, Ekwulobia, Enugu, Nnewi, Nsukka

Owerri: Aba, Ahiara, Okigwe, Orlu, Umuahia

Furthermore, independent: Maronite Eparchy Our Lady of the Annunciation at Ibadan

2.4. Discrimination of Christians in North Nigeria

The current situation in Nigeria has created great tensions, and made the nation politically polarized. Decisions, statements, and appointments of political leaders make many Nigerians question the unity of the country. Nigeria's Constitution recognizes the principle of the federal character, which means that all the country's sectors must be represented in the administration of Federal Institutions. However, this is not the case.

One of the biggest concerns in the country is the concentration of political and military power in the hands of Muslims, and particularly in the same ethnic family: the Hausa-Fulani. All the officials who advise the President are Hausa-Fulani, almost 95 percent of political and military power is concentrated in Muslim hands, in a country which is about 50 percent Christian. Non-Muslims in the country often complain that the security sector is run by one religious group and one ethnic group, in what it is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation.

Christians in the north of the country, in particular, speak of systemic and deeply rooted discrimination based on religion.

"Religious persecution in the north is systemic. For you to be able to practice your religion freely, you should be able to preach anywhere. That is not possible in the north. I cannot build a church, yet the Government employs and pays imams to teach in schools. Every year they have money to build mosques in the budget but will not let you build churches."

Man-Oso Ndagoso, Archbishop of Kaduna⁷

Under the Constitution, Nigeria has freedom of religion, including the freedom to change religion, to practice alone or in community, in private or in public. Christians should not be bound or forced to follow Islamic law, but in the north Christians often feel discriminated against by legislation that targets certain "social vices" and "un-Islamic behavior".

Here are the sticking points compiled by ACN during fact-finding trips to northern Nigeria and interviews with local Christians, over the past few years, who claim to feel like second-class citizens:

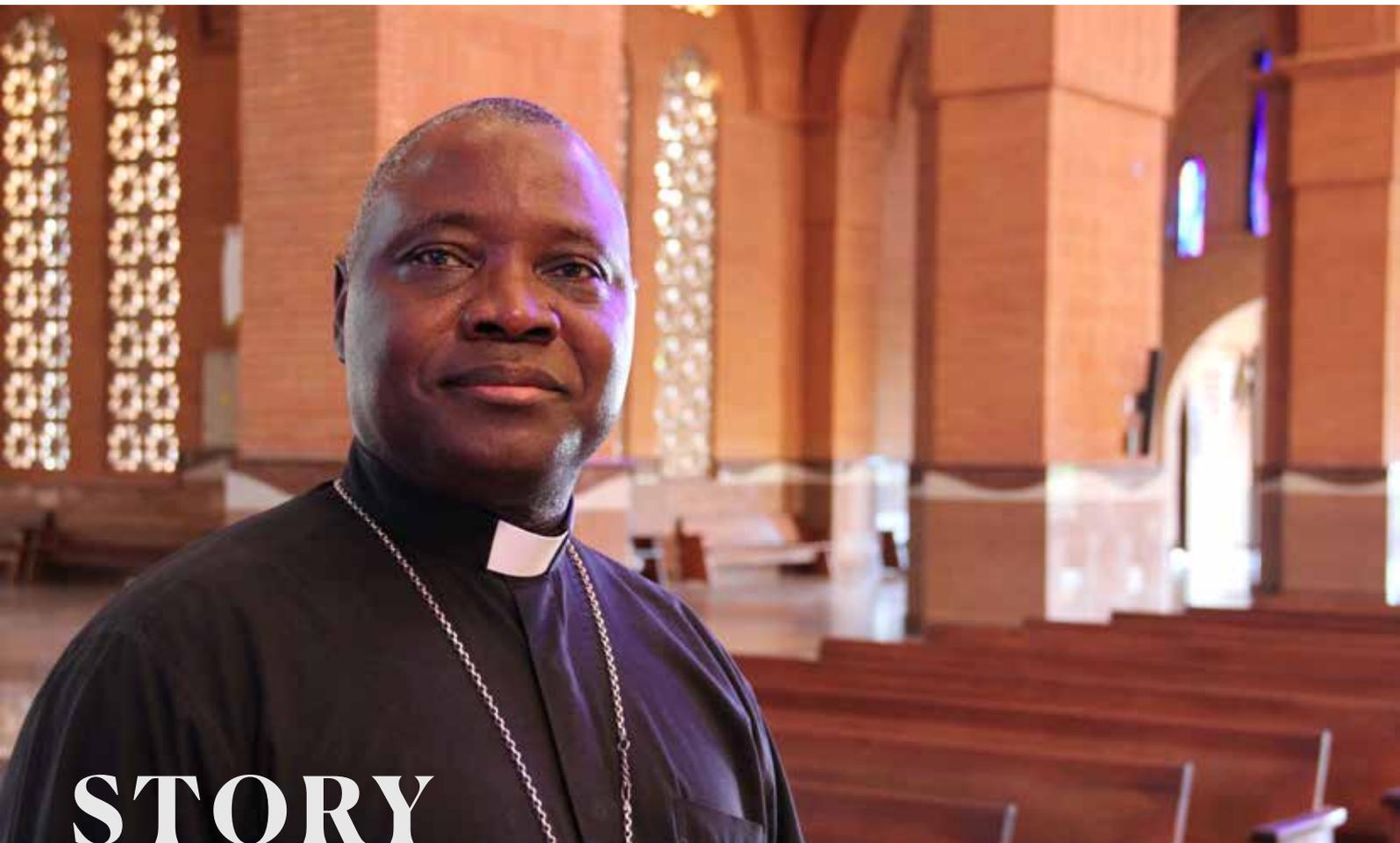
Second-class citizens:

- Denial of access to political businesses, political exclusion
- No equity in recruitment for the armed forces (police, military etc.)
- Lack of social welfare and no access to social support
- Fewer job opportunities, lack of promotion in public positions
- While teaching Christian religious knowledge is not allowed in public schools, Islamic teachers are employed in all public schools in Northern Nigeria
- Abduction and forced marriages
- Christian men are not allowed to marry Muslim women
- Students with Christian names have been denied admission and professional courses. Many opt to change their name in schools
- Christian groups and institutions are not given space to build chapels or places of worship in tertiary institutions
- Christian Churches are not allowed to buy land

Sharia Law applies to Christians:

- Hijab, a head covering worn by Muslim women, must be worn in all secondary schools, by all female students
- Constitution recognizes Criminal Code in the South and Penal Code in the North
- Traditional Muslim moral standards – Hisbah – are often imposed by force, including on non-Muslims. This can include forcibly preventing the mixing of the sexes on public transport systems; enforcing a dress code, especially on women in educational institutions; preventing the performance of music and films and seizing and destroying alcoholic drinks
- The sale of alcohol is forbidden in some states of Nigeria





STORY



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/abuja-under-terrorist-attacks-archbishop-decries-insecurity-and-inequality/>

“There is no equity. There is subtle persecution, which is even more dangerous”

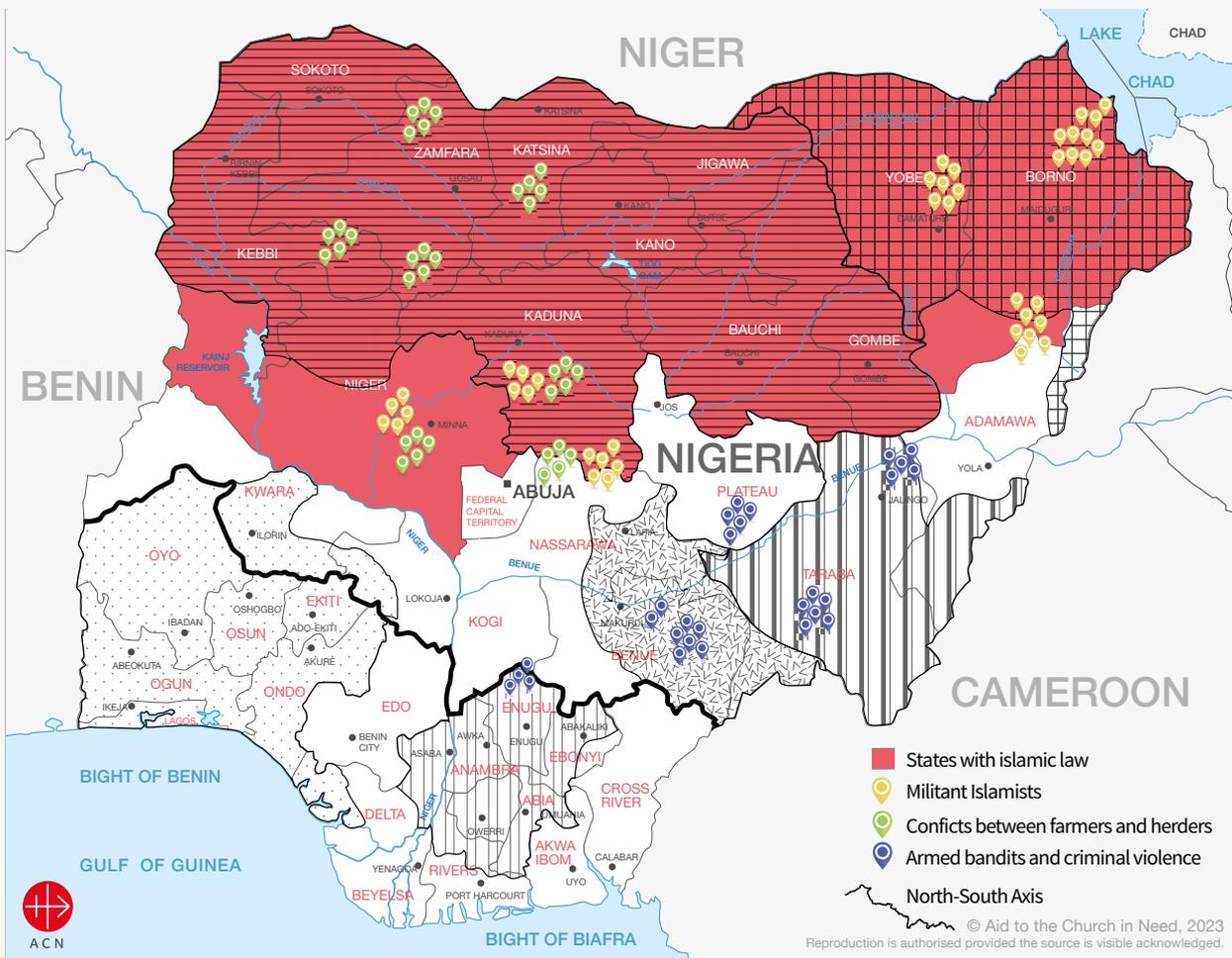
Ignatius Kaigama is the archbishop of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. In statements made to ACN, he explained that the security situation in the whole country is getting unbearable and that even in the capital there have been serious problems.

Asked if there is anti-Christian persecution by the authorities, he replies: “We cannot generalize by simply saying that Christians are persecuted, because in the governing party there are Christians. But persecution is not just about killing people with knives, it is about manipulating things in favor of one group”.

“There is subtle persecution, which is even more dangerous. It is done in such a way that you cannot say they are really killing Christians, they have

not pushed the Christians away, but the way the Government carries on you can be sure the Christians are not favored. There is no equity. We are a country that is more or less 50-50, so there should be equal distribution of resources, of opportunities, and people should feel included in sensitive political, economic or security positions.”

One clear example is the recent decision of the ruling party to defy convention and choose a Muslim-Muslim ticket for the Presidential elections next year. Archbishop Kaigama reacts in disbelief: “In the whole of the north, they could not find a Christian who is qualified to be Vice-President?”



3. Overview of recent conflicts

ACN has been highlighting the plight of Christians in Nigeria for many years, with growing concern, and has singled the country out as one of the most dangerous for Christians in the world. The Global Terrorism Index 2022 ranked Nigeria in 6th place (after Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Burkina Faso, and Syria) and in the Global Peace Index 2022 it ranked 143rd out of 163 countries.

Nigeria’s long-standing security challenges are immense and varied in terms of reasons and geography. The situation has become increasingly complicated over the past ten years. An important driver in all cases is the poor social, cultural and educational condition of the Nigerian population, as well as political mismanagement and corruption. But there are religious and ethnic implications in some of the conflicts as well.

According to Church leaders, the Government has failed to take appropriate action to stem interreligious and interethnic criminality.

“The government has failed us completely; it is the absence of good government that is causing this. Bandits, Boko Haram, kidnappings, these are all symptoms of injustice, of the corruption that is in the system. Our leaders steal our money and take it to the West. Unless we can get to the root of the issue, we will be fighting a losing battle”, said Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso, Archbishop of Kaduna.

When speaking about violence and conflicts in Nigeria, it is important to understand the different conflicts and the areas of impact. Attacks in Nigeria come from many different directions, and it is often difficult to understand the limits between outright persecution, Islamic extremism, historical ethnic rivalries, and simple banditry.

REASONS AND DRIVERS OF THE CONFLICTS:

- Political weakness and mismanagement of the state
- Corruption
- Struggle for power, political and economic interests
- Fight for natural resources
- Social injustice
- Shortage of land, due to climatic reasons and population growth
- Economic precariousness of the vast majority of the population
- Poor social, cultural and educational condition of a large part of the population

To a certain extent, more present in some conflicts than in others:

- Jihadist message and desire to impose a stricter version of Islam
- Ethnic disputes and tribalism - partly stemming from the imbalance caused by colonization

It is difficult to strictly categorize conflicts because while they have different roots, almost all combine a mixture of elements in their development, with tribalism and religiosity being two that are difficult to ignore. This applies to Africa in general and to Nigeria in particular. In an attempt to classify the conflicts, they can be summarized as follows, with geographical location often being one of the major factors to take into account:

3.1. Militant Islamists

3.2. Violence related to armed bandits and crime

3.3. Conflict between farmers and herders

3.4. Communal and ethnic clashes

3.5. Biafra separatists

3.6. Niger delta militants

3.7. Cultism and ritual killings

STORY

Boko Haram fighters, bandits or Fulani?

“We look to God for safety, hoping he will fight for us”

A group of armed men attacked a Catholic and a Baptist Church in Rubuh, in Kaduna State. Local Catholic catechist Emmanuel Joseph witnessed the whole thing.

“Mass had just started when we heard guns firing. Parishioners started running everywhere, chairs were broken in the process, and some were hurt trying to get away. Coming into the church compound, they shot three members who had left the church: a married couple, who left seven children behind, and a young man, who left a wife and three children. They also attacked the local Baptist church, and abducted 36 members of the congregation, mostly women, and killed a man there also.”

According to some of the hostages who were released, the attackers were members of the mostly Muslim Fulani tribe, a nomadic group that often attacks farmers over land disputes. However, the same witnesses say that they dressed just like Boko Haram, which indicates that the terrorist group may be influencing them and aggravating the age-old land dispute.

Emmanuel Joseph says that Kaduna state has not been peaceful since the introduction of Sharia law in 2000. *“There has been a series of attacks, especially on Catholic priests, Catholic worshippers, and Christians in general, and the government is doing nothing to help. Due to Fulani terrorist attacks, we sleep with one eye open.”*

However, the people have not lost their faith. *“With all that has been happening in the state, including constant attacks on the Christian faithful in the Rubuh community, we are weak and tired, and we are beginning to be scared too. We are only focused on how to stay alive, looking upon God for safety in the belief that He will fight back for us.”*



Original article:

<https://acninternational.org/nigeria-we-are-weak-tired-and-scared-we-hope-god-will-fight-for-us/>





STORY

Pentecost Sunday Massacre

The Pentecost Sunday Massacre in Owo shows how these lines are often blurred. Nigerian authorities blame the Islamic State and other Islamic terrorist groups while the local population believes Fulani herdsmen played a role in the attack. Also, the attack in Roboh, Kaduna state, was carried out by unidentified perpetrators.

On 5 June 2022, Pentecost Sunday, armed men attacked St. Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Ondo Diocese, killing around 40 people and injuring more than 80.

The massacre took place in the southwest of Nigeria, a place that hasn't been affected until now by the insecurity and violence which generally affect the north and the Middle Belt.

Fr Andrew Abayomi was still in the building when the attack took place. In an interview with ACN he recalled the moment: "I heard a noise. I thought it was a door slamming, or that someone had fallen, or seen a snake, because that has happened before. But then I heard a second loud noise, and I saw parishioners running in different directions in the church. I stood there in shock, wondering what was going on, when someone ran to me, yelling: 'Father, unknown gunmen!'"

"I remained in the inner part of the sacristy. I could not run as I was surrounded by children, while some adults chung to

me, some even inside my chasuble. I shielded them just as a hen shields her chicks. I heard the voices of my parishioners: 'Father, please save us; Father, pray!' I encouraged them and calmed them, and said they should not worry, that I was praying, and that God would do something. I heard three or four explosions, one after the other."

Parishioner Thaddeus Bade Salau was shot but survived. "I was in church when the incident happened. I was lying down on the ground until one of the gunmen had me stand up along with nine other parishioners, including my beautiful daughter. They shot all of us, one after the other. I was the last to be shot, and I was hit in the cheek. I was the only person out of the ten who survived. It was indeed something I can never forget. It was painful that I lost my beautiful daughter during the attack, but my faith is not shaken by that."



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/massacre-in-owo-nigeria/>

<https://acninternational.org/interview-about-massacre-in-nigeria/>

<https://acninternational.org/nigerian-massacre-interview/>

<https://acninternational.org/testimonies-massacre-nigeria/>



ACN

3.1. Militant Islamists

Area affected: predominantly active in the north-east, moving into north-western states.

Root of the conflict: religious ideology, to impose the strictest version of Islam.

Boko Haram and ISWAP militants are the protagonists of the violence. Most events involving Islamist militants occurred in Borno state, where the group has traditionally been active. It once controlled an area of the size of Belgium but military campaigns have moved the militants back to local spots at the fringes of Lake Chad, the heart of Sambisa Forest, and local villages in Adamawa and Borno. ISWAP acts close to Lake Chad and Boko Haram in the Sambisa Forrest. But during 2022 the Islamists expanded their territorial operations zone, moving further southward, increasing their activities in areas closer to the Federal Capital Territory and Niger State. Also, a militant Islamist group

called Ansaru, that broke away from Boko Haram in early 2012, has been active in the areas around Abuja.

In this report we are not going to delve into jihadist Islamism because there is already a lot of information about it in the media but the numbers are horrific. According to the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, more than 41,600 people have been killed in Nigeria in the Boko Haram conflict, including civilians, Boko Haram fighters and state agents. Other sources speak about Boko Haram killed more than 65,000 people killed between 2011 and 2022⁸.

The most targeted group has been Christians, who have seen their places of worship laid to waste, as well as often being attacked and killed along the highways and having their livelihood destroyed. However it is important to note that the fact that the terrorist groups operate in states with a predominantly Muslim population means that the violence has not only affected Christians, but also Muslims.

BOKO HARAM:



STORY

Boko Haram victim:

Maryamu Joseph was kidnapped by Boko Haram when she was only seven years old. Nine years later, in 2022, she managed to escape.

“I suffered so much at the hands of these heartless, ruthless people. For nine years I saw the shedding of the innocent blood of my fellow Christians, killed by people who do not value life. Words cannot do justice to what I’ve gone through.

They put the Christians in cages, like animals. The first thing they did was forcefully convert us to Islam. They changed my name

to Aisha, a Muslim name, and warned us not to pray as Christians, or we would be killed. When I turned 10, they wanted to marry me to one of their bosses, but I refused. As punishment, they locked me in a cage for an entire year. They brought food once a day and pushed it under the door without ever opening the cage. Right before my eyes, they took one of my siblings and killed him. They cut off his head, then his hands, legs, and stomach. They treated my brother’s body just like a chicken before it’s cooked.”



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/boko-haram-runaway-maryamus-story/>

Boko Haram victim:

Janada Marcus, 22, was with her family when Boko Haram came and surrounded them. They told her father they would kill him unless he had sex with her. When he refused, they cut off his head. Two years later she was taken captive by the same terrorist group. *“On 9 November 2020 I was surprised by Boko Haram. This time they captured me. They took me to the bush and tortured me severely, emotionally, physically and mentally for six days. I suffered a lot of terrible and wicked experiences – beyond explanation – that made those six days seem like six years. On 15 November I was released.”*

Both girls were taken to the trauma center in Maiduguri. *“The first thing they did was to pray for me and encourage me to come back to my faith. I am happy to return to Christianity. I am hoping that, with time, God will help me overcome my bitterness and embrace peace. I still have nightmares, though not as bad as before. Thanks to the Trauma Centre I no longer hallucinate. When I first arrived in Maiduguri, before starting my healing process, I couldn’t stand men, they disgusted me! Now, thanks to my healing process, I have learned to let go of the hate”,* says Maryamu.

3.2. Violence related to armed bandits and crime

Area affected: the North-West and North-Central Regions

Root of the conflict: profit and robbery

Lack of governance and widespread poverty have led to the proliferation of banditry, with some reports suggesting that there are as many as 30,000 bandits in the area, in 100 gangs. Some gangs could have as many as 2,000 members.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the armed groups with regional political ambitions and economic interests and the Islamists. Some armed groups that have been infiltrated by Al-Qaeda or ISIS, and incited by radical preachers, seek to impose the strictest version of Islam, including through violence.

Over the past seven years, the North-West and North-Central Regions have experienced the greatest concentration of kidnappings in the country. The ransoms collected through the abductions – some of them massive – have become a business for criminal gangs.

There have also been reports of links between armed bandits and Islamist terrorist groups for economic reasons. One of the



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/janadas-story-victim-of-boko-haram-in-nigeria/>



In Janada’s case, she says that *“after a series of counselling sessions, I was taken to the hospital for a check-up and treatment in case I had contracted any disease. After that, I underwent six months of healing, prayers and counselling. Now I am back on my feet. At first, I found it almost impossible to let go of my past, but after spending those months at the Trauma Center, I was able to let go. After my healing process, I enrolled in college. I am very happy, and I will give my all to finish my degree and become someone great in society. Emotionally, I have learned to let go of my past; I have learned the art of healing by letting go of my pain. My faith has strengthened.”*

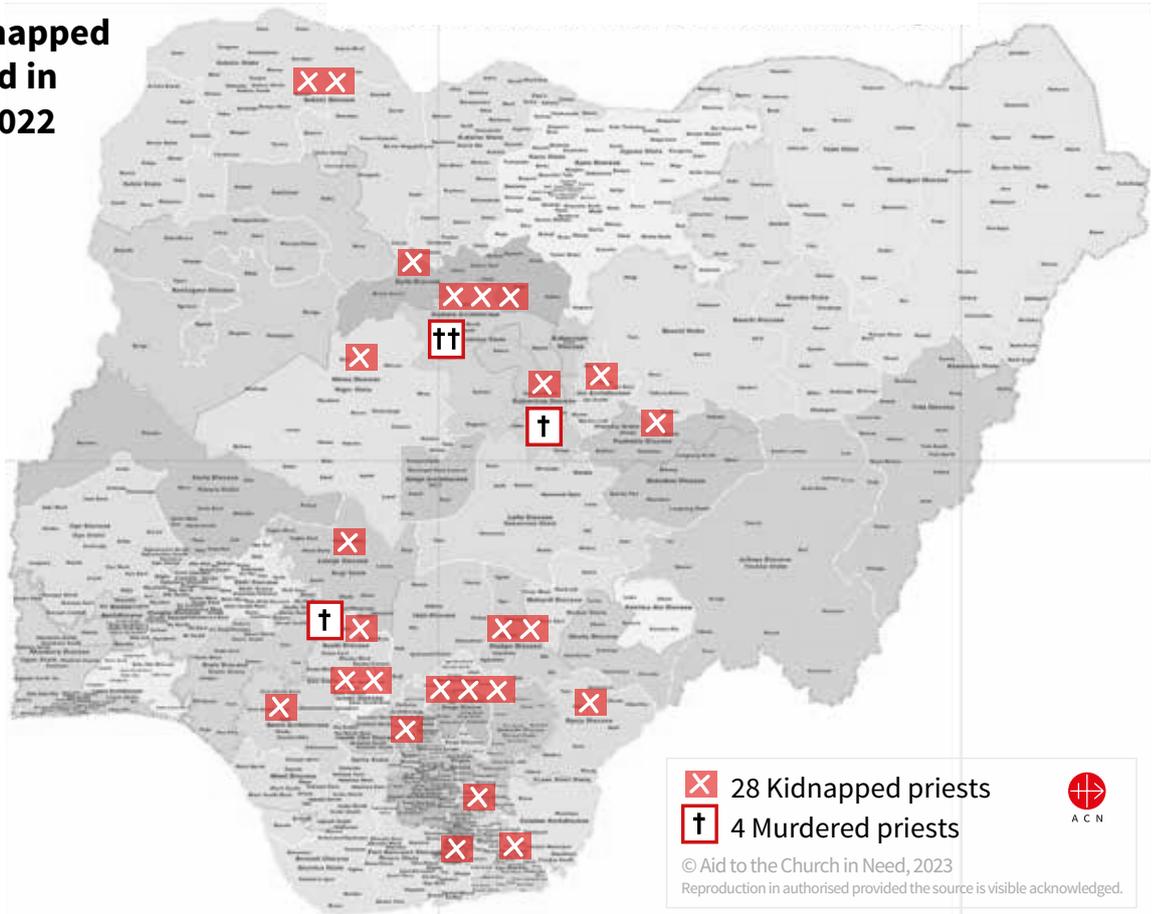
victims, kidnapped in 2020 in Kaduna by bandits, told ACN in a confidential interview that the first idea of the criminals was to sell them to Boko Haram (in exchange for weapons) but after some days they decided to ask their families for ransom instead.

The state of Kaduna has been one of the hardest-hit by the wave of violence and criminality that is sweeping large parts of Nigeria.

“In the past three and a half years, eight of my priests have been kidnapped, two have been killed, and one has been in captivity for nearly four years. Five were released. In fifty of my parishes, priests cannot stay in their rectories, because they are targets, they are seen as an easy source of money for ransom. I cannot go on pastoral visits like I usually do, priests cannot go to villages and say masses. People cannot go to farm, so they cannot feed themselves. With this insecurity people are starved of the sacraments”, said Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso, Archbishop of Kaduna, to ACN.

“Everybody is on the edge. All of us, the clergy, the laypeople, everybody. People are afraid, people are traumatized, and rightly so. With this situation, nobody is safe anywhere. If you go out of your house, even in the daytime, until you come back, you are not safe”, he added.

Priests kidnapped or murdered in Nigeria in 2022



X 28 Kidnapped priests

† 4 Murdered priests



A C N

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STORY

Priests and nuns in Nigeria are “not for sale”



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/nigerian-hardships-our-priests-nuns-and-catechists-are-not-for-sale/>



A C N

Dozens of priests and nuns have been kidnapped in Nigeria over the past years, including a bishop at the end of 2020.

Moses Chikwe, of the Diocese of Awerrri, was released, but his kidnapping raised waves and called attention to the plight of so many other religious leaders and even regular citizens.

“Kidnappings have been going on for a long time in Nigeria, people thought it would not happen to religious leaders. So, when it does happen, it is big news”, said Ignatius Kaigama, archbishop of Abuja, stressing that while it is a very sad fact that the country’s religious leaders are being kidnapped and killed, there are other Nigerians who are suffering the same fate: *“They are what I would call silent victims, and there are many of them,”* he said.

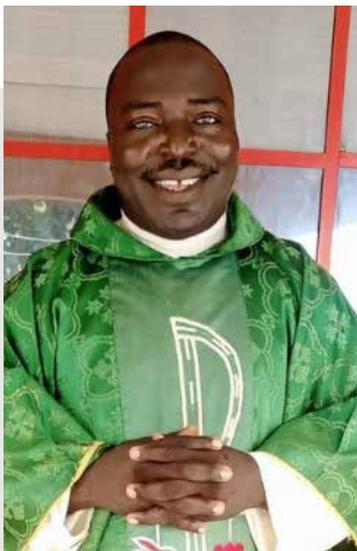
“The fact that our security forces are unable to identify these people is disconcerting and suggests that they do not make much effort to ensure security.”

Bishop Kaigama believes that there are several motives behind these abductions. There are economic kidnappings perpetrated by criminals who *“are only looking for quick money, who hold people hostage and ask for millions in ransom”*, but there are also religious fundamentalists who seek territorial expansion, *“to conquer those they consider infidels, and Christians are number one on their list”*, he said.

“Paying a ransom means putting everyone for sale and in danger; all the priests, nuns and collaborators of the Church who move continuously between the villages, without enjoying any kind of comfort, but always ready to sacrifice themselves for the love of God and His people, would put them in danger because this encourages criminality and invites the kidnappers to do more harm,” Kaigama says.



A C N



STORY

Besides dozens of kidnappings, a total of four priests were murdered in Nigeria during 2022

One of those priests, Fr. Mark Cheitnum, was director of communications for the diocese of Kafanchan, and a friend of Aid to the Church in Need.

During a visit by ACN to Kafanchan, in 2017, the late Bishop Joseph Bagobiri and Father Mark met the charity's representatives and explained the terrible impact and increasing number of attacks by Fulani herdsmen terrorists in his diocese, in the southern part of Kaduna State.

Maria Lozano, head of press of ACN International, was part of the delegation, and, on hearing the news, expressed her concern and sadness about the killing of Father Mark: "It is tragic, another priest killed in Nigeria, which brings the total number to four this year alone. Father Mark was deeply engaged in giving a voice to the innocent victims of violence in his diocese, who number in the hundreds, at least. Now he himself has become a victim in this spiral of death."

"The Diocese of Kafanchan has been suffering from terror and violence for many years. I remember that when we visited Bishop Bagobiri and Father Mark there was a curfew and we couldn't spend too much time in the diocese, we had to leave in the afternoon because it was too dangerous. Terror and fear are affecting not just Kafanchan, but the whole state of Kaduna, and the violence has been spreading to Benue and other parts of the Middle Belt."

In a separate message, the directors of communication of the Catholic dioceses in Nigeria urged the government to do whatever is necessary to provide security, protecting the lives and livelihoods of priests in Nigeria.



Original articles:
<https://acninternational.org/another-priest-killed-in-nigeria/>



3.3. Conflict between farmers and herders

Area affected: mainly in the Middle Belt but increasingly moving to southern states.

Root of the conflict: Land, though ethnic and religious factors often also come into play.

This conflict is probably the most serious for Nigeria at the moment, since it has resulted in more deaths than those caused by Boko Haram in recent years. It is also one of the most complicated, as it mixes struggles for resources with political, religious and ethnic elements. For this reason, this report devotes more space to it than to the other conflicts.

The roots of this conflict are as old as human history. Access to land and to pasture has been a challenge between nomads and settled communities, and traditionally governed by a delicate balance based on agreements about paths and roads to use.

Originally, the conflict had nothing to do with religion or ethnicity. Lack of natural resources, increasingly dry land, population growth, the need for more farming space, lack of water, but also an increase in cattle population has broken the balance. Also, the fact that clashes used to be fought with spears and arrows, while today some herders are armed with modern weapons, plays a sad role in the dimension of the conflict.

But in some places, because of the failure of security forces, competition over resources is used as a pretext to kill and maim along ethnic or religious lines. The conflict has also been dangerously politicized by some state government officials who have inflamed tensions by embarking on a blame game along political party lines.

Also, the fact that the Fulani herders are transhumant and not settled means that they are often neglected by the authorities and feel discriminated. Some of them are uneducated and have very poor life conditions. This frustration is used by terrorist and criminal groups to recruit them.

Who are the Fulani?

“Fulani”, as they are widely known in Nigeria, is the Hausa name for the *Fulbe* people that has been adopted into English. Whereas in French, Peul(s) is used, which comes from Wolof. This ethnic group is widely spread throughout West Africa, from Mauritania to Nigeria and Niger, and across parts of central Africa into Sudan.

Due to their huge geographical distribution, they are not a homogeneous group, they have dialectical and cultural variations, but they are considered the largest pastoralist population in Africa and the largest nomadic pastoral community in the world. Some sources speak about 35-40 million worldwide, but it is difficult to know as it is difficult to assign individuals and to link some populations to this particular ethnic group.

They mainly raise cattle, but sheep and goats are also important. Most pastoral families now also farm crops on a subsistence basis – grains such as maize, sorghum, and millet, and vegetables like sweet potato and cowpea – even while raising livestock is their main activity and is central to their culture.

3.3.1 Religious dimension

The pastoral Fulani are predominantly Muslim, but there is also a small and significant Fulani Christian minority. In this context, another important fact is that three times in history, the Fulani have established empires: the theocratic state of Fouta Djallon in Middle Guinea (18th century), the Fulani Empire of the Macina in Mali (19th century) and the Fulani Empire or the Sultanate of Sokoto in Nigeria (19th century). Even if today the Fulani do not control any state, it is very important to understand the role of the Fulani in the breakthrough of Islam in West Africa and the fear of Christians until today. This is a factor that feeds fear and reminds Christians and non-Muslims of the dark old times of slavery and forced conversion.

There are between 12-16 million Fulani in Nigeria (6%-8% of the population), but not all are nomads. According to reports given to ACN during research trips, most of the Fulani causing problems in Nigeria seem to be originally from neighboring countries.

The Fulani herdsmen’s transhumance route stretches from Lake Chad, in the north-east, to the area around Lagos in south-west Nigeria, i.e. it crosses the country diagonally, along an eastern axis. Depending on the circumstances – the season, how the harvest has been, the conditions of the crops and the number of cattle heads – serious conflicts occur in greater or lesser numbers. Plateau, Taraba and Benue are the most affected states, all of them populated mostly by Christian farmers.

It is difficult to know how much Islamic ideology and “jihad” play a role in the acts of violence. Is there a jihadist message and a further incentive to expand their areas of control through the herders? This is difficult to ascertain, but ACN partners speak about a “hidden agenda” because the fact is that they have invaded the lands of predominantly Christian farmers, murdering, raping and injuring, and ravaging villages and towns, and in so doing provoking a mass departure of Christians who see their lives and

Fulani Empire or the Sultanate of Sokoto in Nigeria

In 1804, Usman dan Fodio, a Fulani cleric, declared jihad to overthrow the Hausa Kingdoms in the north of the country. Many of his followers were Fulani. Because of his ethnicity, he was able to attract the Fulani clan leaders and wealthy Fulani cattle owners, who, like feudal lords, provided servants and troops for the jihad that began in Gobir, one of the seven original Hausa Kingdoms, located over Katsina and Zamfara.

The new state that resulted from Usman dan Fodio's jihad was the Sokoto Caliphate, named after his capital at Sokoto, founded in 1809.

Usman dan Fodio created a huge empire in Africa. By the middle of the 19th century, the Sokoto Caliphate stretched 1,500 kilometers from Dori in modern Burkina Faso to southern Adamawa in Cameroon and included Nupe lands, Ilorin in northern Yorubaland, and much of the Benue River valley.

Usman dan Fodio's jihad inspired a series of holy wars in other

parts of the savanna and Sahel and led to the foundation of Islamic states in Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast, Chad, Central African Republic and Sudan. Expansion attempts toward the Middle Belt were stopped by the resistance of local peoples to incorporation into the emirate states.

This history is important to understand the reluctance and fears of part of the population. Today, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammed Sa'ad Abubakar III, remains the religious leader of Northern Nigeria's Muslims and the most important Muslim position in Nigeria. However, he is engaged in the pursuit of peace between conflicting religious and cultural forces. He has worked on actions of dialogue and understanding between religions with Catholic Church leaders such as Cardinal John Onaiyekan and Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto. On 22 August 2019, he was appointed as Co-President of the Council of Religion for Peace (CRP).



3.3.2. Political and ethnic dimension

The problem is further complicated by the almost total lack of political reaction. There are many complaints of inaction by the Federal government. The fact that Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari, is a Fulani, has raised suspicions and even accusations of failure to condemn and prosecute systematic attacks by Fulani militias.

The audacity with which they travel to every corner of Nigeria in search of pasture for their livestock is unparalleled, and there are many instances of these herders encroaching on farmland in all parts of the country, armed with rifles and other weapons, and acting with impunity. The lack of meaningful prosecution of these men further fuels the belief that they have the federal government's support. There is no conclusive evidence that this is the case, but the lack of willpower or motivation to stop the rise in these crimes makes it difficult to convince many Nigerians that there is no connection between the unilateral appointment of officials and the failure to prosecute the perpetrators of these

crimes against humanity and what appears to be a selective killing of Christians⁹.

Feelings of injustice and frustration on the part of the victims – due to the impunity of the perpetrators – is immense and in some parts of the country citizen self-defense groups have been created. This factor complicates the conflict even more but has been seen as the only solution to stop the violent attacks of the Fulani herdsmen in many places.

"The scale of killings, displacement and wanton destruction of property by these Fulani jihadist militias only buttresses the now revealed agenda to depopulate Christian communities in Nigeria and take over lands. Tellingly, the government in power in Nigeria at the moment continues to do nothing about these persistent attacks, save to give laughable reasons like 'climate change' or that some Muslims too are sometimes killed in attacks by so-called bandits", said Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe of Makurdi, one of the dioceses in Benue State.



STORY

Fulani conflict is above all a religious war, says bishop



Original article:

<https://acninternational.org/in-nigeria-a-priest-recounts-his-kidnaping-by-fulani-herdsmen/>



During a webinar hosted by Aid to the Church in Need International (ACN), in October 2021, the speakers, among them one bishop and several priests from Nigeria, confirmed that the violence that has been plaguing the country for the past several years is not simply due to “clashes” between Muslim herdsmen and Christian farmers, over land.

“It is not just about issues of grazing. For me, this is a religious war”, stated Bishop Wilfred Anagbe, of the diocese of Makurdi, in Benue state.

“They have an agenda, which is the Islamization of this country. And they are doing that by carefully eliminating all the Christians and occupying the territories. If it was about grazing, why kill people? And why burn their homes?”, he asked.

Johan Viljoen, director of the Denis Hurley Peace Institute of South Africa, and an expert on Fulani armed militia attacks in Southeast Nigeria, spoke of a *“concerted, well-planned occupation. This is all happening under the cover of Miyetti Allah, of which President Buhari is the patron”,* he said, referring

to an organization which claims to defend the rights of Fulani herdsmen.

High-level state involvement is one reason why the armed forces have proven unwilling to step in and control the violence. *“I don’t think the army is trying to solve anything. If anything, they would try to promote it”,* explained Mr. Viljoen, observing that despite years of violence *“not a single Fulani has been prosecuted for the violence”*.

Bishop Wilfred stressed that the armed forces lie under the direct control of the President and, furthermore, *“all the service chiefs, from the navy, army, air force and police are Muslims”*.

Official figures point to around 3,000 dead from the wave of violence over the past few years, but those on the ground say that the number could be as high as 36,000, with many more displaced, destitute, or deeply traumatized by their experiences. With many NGOs leaving the danger zones, the Catholic Church and its institutions, with which ACN International works closely, are the only reliable alternatives to get aid to the people on the ground.

3.3.3 Between propaganda and silence

Because of the huge number and the dimension of conflicts that people of Fulani ethnicity are involved in, the Global Terrorism Index portrays the Fulani as an ethnic terrorist group.

The complexity of this problem makes it crucial to communicate this very serious conflict, the worst in Nigeria in our days, in an adequate way and as realistically as possible.

On the one hand, some organizations have complained that reports tend to ignore violence against Fulani communities, which has been frequent across the center and north of Nigeria, and in other parts of the region¹⁰. According to these organizations the violence has been portrayed as being one-way, rather than as a dynamic which often involves many different armed actors and causes high numbers of civilian casualties across ethnic lines.

However, most of the media and NGO reports speak about “violence between herders and farming communities” and describe the problem as clashes between two equal parties. As described

before, this may have been the case originally, but the problem has escalated, and the victims today are mostly farmers. The casualties and damage cannot be compared. Many houses – entire villages – have been destroyed, land burned, and many people had to flee. Benue State alone has 2 million IDP’s, mostly farmers.

From 2017 until the beginning of May 2020, there were 654 attacks against Christian farmers: Fulani extremists killed 2,539 individuals, wounded over 393, kidnapped more than 253 persons, raped 16 women and girls, and destroyed 7,582 homes and 24 churches¹¹.

On the other hand, it is also wrong to stigmatize an entire ethnic group as criminals or terrorist. Animosity has increased against Fulanis in Nigeria, and it is easy to mark out criminal gangs of bandits in north-west Nigeria, who are often Fulani in composition, as “Fulani extremists” and not as “criminals”, “bandits” or “cattle rustlers”, whereas when the violence is carried out by criminals from other ethnic groups they are not labeled by the ethnicity.

STORY

Nigerian bishop calls for end of “conspiracy of silence” on persecution of Christians



Original article:

<https://acninternational.org/recent-attacks-in-nigeria/>

<https://acninternational.org/church-in-nigeria-under-attack/>



Makurdi Diocese is located in the Middle Belt, in Benue state, where “according to records from the State government, over 5,000 of our people have been killed between 2011 and June, 2022”, explains Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe.

“Figures from the Benue State government again reveal that as of June 2022, Benue State has suffered over 200 attacks with property destroyed and close to two million people displaced and living in camps across the State. Many children have had their education cut short as their parents, unable to go to their farms, cannot cater for their school needs. There is a palpable food insecurity and there is the complete loss of human dignity as men, women and children often resort to unsafe coping mechanisms for survival.”

Besides the immediate tragedy which is the loss of lives, there are the permanent scars borne by those who are left behind. Makurdi currently houses 80% of the displaced in Benue State, and despite financial difficulties, the local Church has done its best to relieve suffering and need. “It is impossible to maintain

one’s equilibrium after witnessing the massacre of innocent and defenseless people in the face of harsh economic conditions, notwithstanding our role as God’s ministers. The pain is much and the wounds not likely to heal any time soon.”

Bishop Wilfred rejected the idea that religion has nothing to do with the conflict, saying he believes “the attacks, particularly in Benue State, increasingly look like a jihad against Christians”, adding that “Benue is targeted because the majority of its people have steadfastly declared their will not to surrender their Judeo-Christian faith, identity and cultural values to Islam”.

Faced with this crisis, the Catholic leader asks for outspoken support from the West. “I call on all who listen to me today to come to the aid of the Christian community in Benue and indeed in Nigeria as a whole before it becomes too late.”

Abandoned by local authorities, the Church is grateful for the support it has received from Aid to the Church in Need, which Bishop Anagbe described as “a source of light in a valley of darkness”.

3.4. Communal and ethnic clashes¹²

Area: in the North-Central Region (Hausa/Fulani) and in the Benue (Tiv/Jukun) and Enugu (Agulari/Omulai) states.

Root of the conflict: Tribal conflict with primary interest in occupying land and leadership.

As mentioned several times before, it is often difficult to understand the limits between outright persecution, historical ethnic rivalries, and simple banditry.

Many African countries have a very short history as a national unit. Furthermore, as we well know, many of the borders were drawn by European powers, without regard to ethnic families. African countries did not create their borders based on a national identity forged over the centuries. Nigeria is just 63 years old. Before it was called Nigeria, several centuries-old states and kingdoms had coexisted, each with its own allies and rivals. The rivalry between ethnic groups is still a polarizing factor in many African countries. Ethiopia and South Sudan are clear examples.

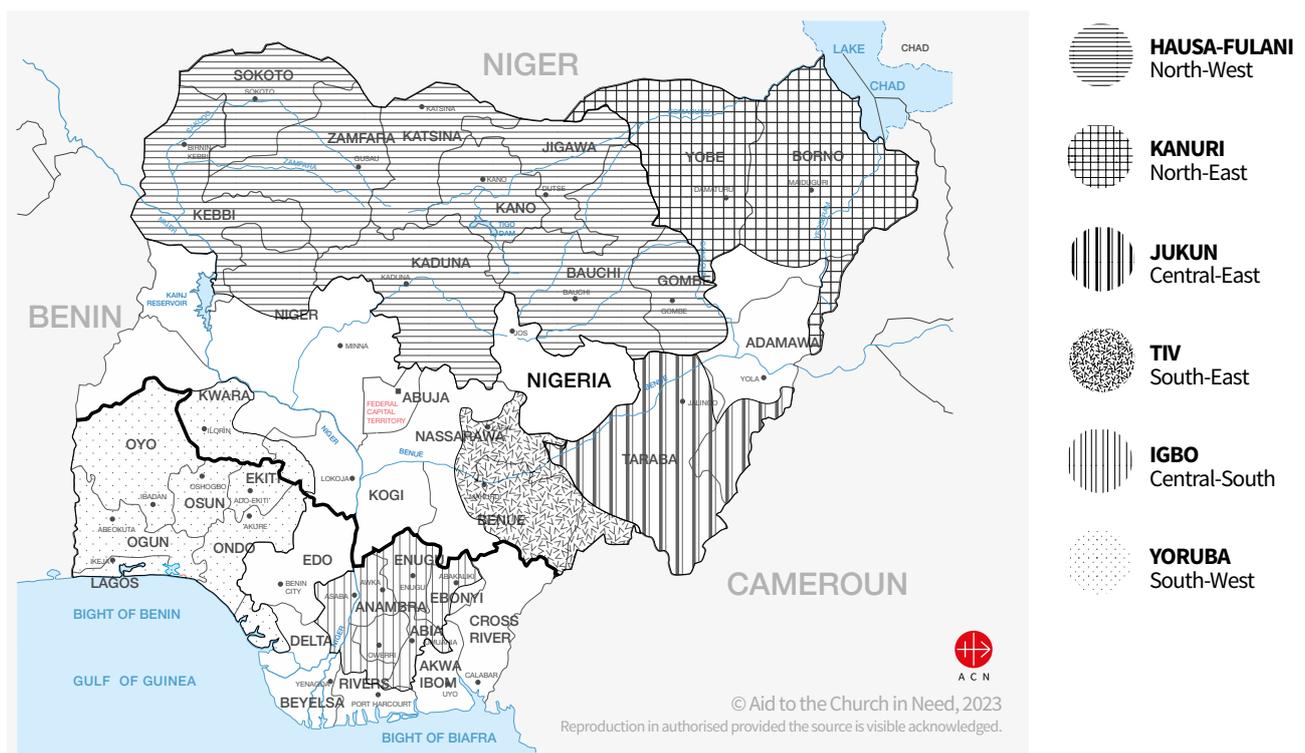
Historically, identities in Nigeria have played an important role in the political process both during the colonial period and in the post-colonial era. Many of the imbalances Nigeria suffers today date back to the colonial period, because the British allowed or even encouraged the emergence of identities as major factors in the distribution of power and sociopolitical development.

Like with many other ruling powers, divide and conquer was a factor and this has to be taken into account in the reality of the country today. Muslims against the Christians, northerners against southerners, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo among themselves. Religious and ethnic differences became strategic factors in the merger of territories that arose during the colonial era.

On the other hand, it is important to try to understand the culture and idiosyncrasy of the African continent, so unknown to most Westerners. In Africa, ethnicity is still considered the most basic and politically salient identity of the citizen. Most Africans, in competitive and non-competitive contexts, tend to define themselves through ethnicity, which is stronger than social class or religion. A Comboni missionary who worked as missionary in South Sudan for many years expressed it this way to ACN during a research trip: blood (of the tribe) is stronger than water (of baptism). Rather than Descartes's "I think, therefore I am", one of the firm foundations of traditional African metaphysics is "I am united to the other, to the others, therefore I exist, therefore we exist". The common house that everyone is talking about now is a philosophical principle of African culture.

In Nigeria almost half of Nigerians (48.2%) identified with an ethnic identity, compared with 28.4% who identified by reference to class and 21% who identified with a religious group. This means that more than 66% of Nigerians consider themselves members of a basic ethnic or religious group.

However, violent conflicts for purely ethnic reasons in Nigeria are few in number, and rarely occur today. The Tiv-Jukun conflict in Benue state, which has political and economic undertones, goes back to the post-colonial time, and had a resurgence in 2020, but has decreased again. The Hausa-Fulani conflict in Zamfara and Katsina is related to criminality and banditry. Purely ethnic disputes do not usually reach the magnitude of the other conflicts mentioned here. But being part of the identity of the Nigerians, it is a very passionate, intrinsic and powerful factor that, if added to other conflicts, only increases and expands the problem.



3.5. Biafra separatists

Area affected: the South-East, in particular the Igbo states

Root of the conflict: political independence ambitions

The post-independence civil war, known as the Biafran War, took place between 1967 and 1970, killing over a million people, with some sources pointing to about two million, including many civilians. Barely 50 years later, south-eastern Nigeria, particularly the Igbo ethnic group who fought hardest for the independence of the Republic of Biafra, still have it very much in mind. Parents and grandparents were part of the fight for Biafra and the scars remain. For these, mostly Nigerian Christians of the Igbo ethnic group, but not exclusively, Biafra represents the aspirations of the broader south-eastern population, which feels it cannot coexist with a government dominated by the agenda and the interests of the mostly Muslim Hausa-Fulanis of Northern Nigeria. Tensions are rising in the Igbo states of Imo, Abia, Enugu, Anambra and Ebonyi States. Corruption, arbitrary violence, land rivalries, ethnic strife, religious differences and government neglect have led to a resurgence of secessionist militants demanding independence.

For the Igbo the land is sacred and the conflict with the Fulani increases the tensions. Most of the pro-Biafra groups in the southeast region are campaigning for greater autonomy by peacefully protesting against the Nigerian federal government.

However, in the context of a growing separatist movement in the region, clashes between the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and government forces have erupted. A wave of violence hit southeast Nigeria in the first six months of 2022, with an 80% increase in incidents compared to the same period of the previous year. Unidentified armed groups are responsible for more than half of these cases. The attacks were often blamed on IPOB and its security outfit, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). However, IPOB has denied involvement and it blames bandits and Fulani herdsmen for the actions, calling on people “to rise and unite against” them¹³.

The Federal Government declared IPOB a terrorist group, and threw its founder, Nnamdi Kanu in jail, where he remains. IPOB has continued to issue intermittent sit-at-home orders as protest against it. Extreme violence against civilians by Nigeria’s security forces and arbitrary killings have motivated young men to join the militant groups in the region.



Soldiers fighting for the breakaway Republic of Biafra march during the Nigerian Civil War, fought from 1967 to 1970. Wikimedia Commons

3.6. Niger delta militants

Area affected: Niger Delta, in southern Nigeria

Root of the conflict: corruption, robbery, social injustice, environmental damage

For more than two decades, the Niger Delta has been characterized by protests led by communities demanding environmental protection and militia groups protesting the exclusion of the people from the benefits of the oil industry. Social injustice and poverty are the two drivers of the demonstrators. There is a real

anger in the Niger Delta. Many fishermen and farmers in the region have seen their livelihoods destroyed by land and water pollution.

The protest evolved into an insurgency in 2005 and gave rise to a proliferation of armed groups. In 2009 there was an amnesty agreement from the Government of Nigeria, which imposed the disarmament of armed groups, small and large. The ex-militants handed over weapons and ammunition ranging from rocket launchers, AK-47 rifles, pump-action rifles, machine guns and gunboats.



© Ismael Martínez Sánchez | ACN

But since the motives and claims that generated the violence have yet to be resolved, there continue to be armed gangs and militias, as well as criminals dedicated to oil theft.

The Niger Delta is a hotbed for piracy in coastal communities. But, in recent years the presence of international naval vessels and co-operation with regional authorities have had a positive impact on piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, with a decrease in incidents. Still, in 2021, there are reports of 115 vessels being boarded, 11 attempted attacks, five vessels fired upon, one vessel hijacked and 57 crew kidnapped in seven separate incidents¹⁴.

“Oil exploration and exploitation in the Delta State began in 1956. That means it predates the creation of the Nigerian state. A place called Oloibri was the first place that got the crude oil. But if you go there, it’s like a ghost town. There is nothing. So much money is stolen from the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta is where crude is extracted from, and not just crude. There are many gas deposits there. However, there are no roads, no electricity, no drinking water, no government presence really, even gas for cooking or fuel for cars are bought at a very high price. In many places the gas escapes and when it rains, the gas, which has passed into the atmosphere, falls as acid rain. People drink from the stream, because there is no drinkable water anywhere. Alternative drinking water is very expensive to obtain. I lost my older sister, my older brother, and my mother to cancer. And it’s not just my own family. A lot of people have died of cancer. We don’t know where they get this cancer, but I think it comes from drinking water. And I fear many more people will die from it. Our entire aquatic life has been destroyed.”

Bishop H. Egbebo of Bomadi, in Delta state, to ACN during an interview in 2018.

3.7. Cultism and ritual killings

Area affected: South-East and Southern Nigeria

Root of the conflict: economic wealth, criminality, power, superstition

3.7.1. Cultism¹⁵

Cultism refers to the phenomenon of secret societies, secret brotherhoods or secret cults that is widespread in southern Nigeria. It was born in the university environment in the 1950s, copying the tradition of American fraternities and freemasons, around the ideal of independence. In the 1980s, however, secret societies evolved into dangerous and violent criminal organisations that control organised crime, including human trafficking ne-



tworks in Nigeria and around the world. They maintain university campuses as centres of operations, but act like real mafia clans. Membership in secret societies is prohibited by the Nigerian Constitution and hundreds of them were banned in 2004 by a law on secret cults. The three oldest were founded in the University of Ibadan, in Oyo State, where the Yoruba ethnicity is the majority. Benin, in Edo State, is now considered the capital of cultism.

Membership implies access to influence, social acceptance, power and wealth. There is an iron hierarchy typical of classic criminal organisations. The exact number of confraternities operating in Nigeria is currently unknown, but some estimates put the number at several hundred.

Initiation rituals are violent and members are often recruited through coercion and psychological manipulation. Women who are initiated are often victims of rape, and in other cases initiation rituals include the use of human blood.

Secret cults are a serious problem in universities, but similar phenomena have appeared in big cities. Since the 1980s, street gangs of young people called area boys or agberos have been involved in petty crime. Today, these gangs have formed sects that operate and act much like their counterparts on college campuses and some are used by political leaders at election time, to fight other rival groups, and to engage in criminal activities related to robbery, prostitution and kidnapping rings.

3.7.2 Ritual killings¹⁶

Ritual killings are still a common phenomenon in Nigerian life. Ritual killers search for human parts – heads, breasts, tongues and sexual organs – requested by witchdoctors, juju priests, traditional healers and occultists who use them for their sacrifices or to prepare supposedly magical potions. Ritual sacrifice was practised in primitive religious communities in Nigeria long before the arrival of Christianity in Africa. In traditional African

practices, a human being was considered the most acceptable offering to the gods or deities. Human rituals serve to protect and strengthen the people. Superstition is still a widespread phenomenon in Nigeria, where many believe that amulets and charms can protect them against misfortune such as accidents, illness and death.

Furthermore, some believe that ritual sacrifices and magical concoctions prepared with strange ingredients can bring money, fame and power. For the so-called money rituals, parts of the human body are often used, which are believed to be more powerful. Ritual killing has taken on a new dimension and thousands of men and women, of all ages, have been killed and their body parts cut off for money sacrifices. The number of people murdered, and dismembered bodies found in Nigerian cities has been deeply shocking in recent years. There is no official record on the occurrence of money ritual related killings in Nigeria, however, there are regular media reports of these incidents across the country. Media coverage of some cases involving individuals caught and arrested for the possession of human body parts revealed that, in several cases, perpetrators were family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and religious leaders of the victims.

Reports blame Nigerian society's emphasis on material prosperity and wealth for the pressure felt, especially by young people, to earn money, with many turning to voodoo and other black magic rituals to achieve this. Social networks, including Nigerian cinema – Nollywood –, seem to have fostered superstition among young people with little education and lack of resources. Religious sects that promote the so-called “prosperity gospel” are also accused because they do not teach the values of honesty, diligence and hard work, but rather that miracles provide an easy path to material goods at any price.

The states where most cases were reported are Niger Delta, Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos.



4. IDPs in Nigeria

According to the UNHCR, conflicts involving Boko Haram and other armed groups, as well as clashes between herders and farmers, have displaced some three million Nigerians (2022) from their homes. North-east Nigeria, north-west Nigeria and the Middle Belt are the most affected by this tragedy.

The conflict stemming from of Boko Haram and ISWAP attacks in north-eastern Nigeria continues into its 12th year. Attacks and insecurity have displaced millions of people, devastated agricultural production and other livelihoods, cut off essential services and caused a security crisis. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 2.2 million people are displaced due to conflict in the three worst affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. Some of the victims have been in the camps or settlements for over eight years.

The diocese of Maiduguri, the place of origin of the Islamist group Boko Haram, is the worst hit by its attacks. More than 200 churches, many parishes, 25 schools, three hospitals, three monasteries and countless shops, as well as private houses and business centres were destroyed in the diocese. Some of them have been rebuilt with the help of ACN.

Even though many refugees have returned to Borno, for example from Cameroon, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons have not been able to return to their homes and villages, which were destroyed and are still unsafe. They are concentrated in “garrison cities” defended by the Nigerian armed forces but with a limited perimeter and from which it is risky to leave. Living conditions are difficult, congested and unsanitary. It also limits the livelihood possibilities of displaced farmers, who are unable to plant or harvest their fields.



NIGERIA: ALL POPULATION SNAPSHOT

AS OF
31 DECEMBER 2022

KEY FIGURES

2,197,824

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs)
in North-East, 93% due to insurgency, 6% communal clashes and 1% natural disaster. 2,012,660 in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.
Source: DTM - Round 41, Jun 2022.

969,757

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs)
IDPs. 474,744 are in North-West while 495,013 are in North-Central
Source: DTM - Round 9 for Northwest and Northcentral, Mar 2022.

1,983,130

RETURNEES
Cumulative since 2015, 160,198 or 8% are former refugees who returned spontaneously with some passing through IDP Situation.
Source: DTM - Round 41, June 2022. Since beginning of 2022, UNHCR has registered 19,693 spontaneous refugee returns. In addition 3,880 refugees returned through voluntary repatriation from Cameroon since the beginning of 2021.

339,669

NIGERIAN REFUGEES REGISTERED IN CAMEROON, CHAD, AND NIGER
Source: UNHCR November 2022.

92,905

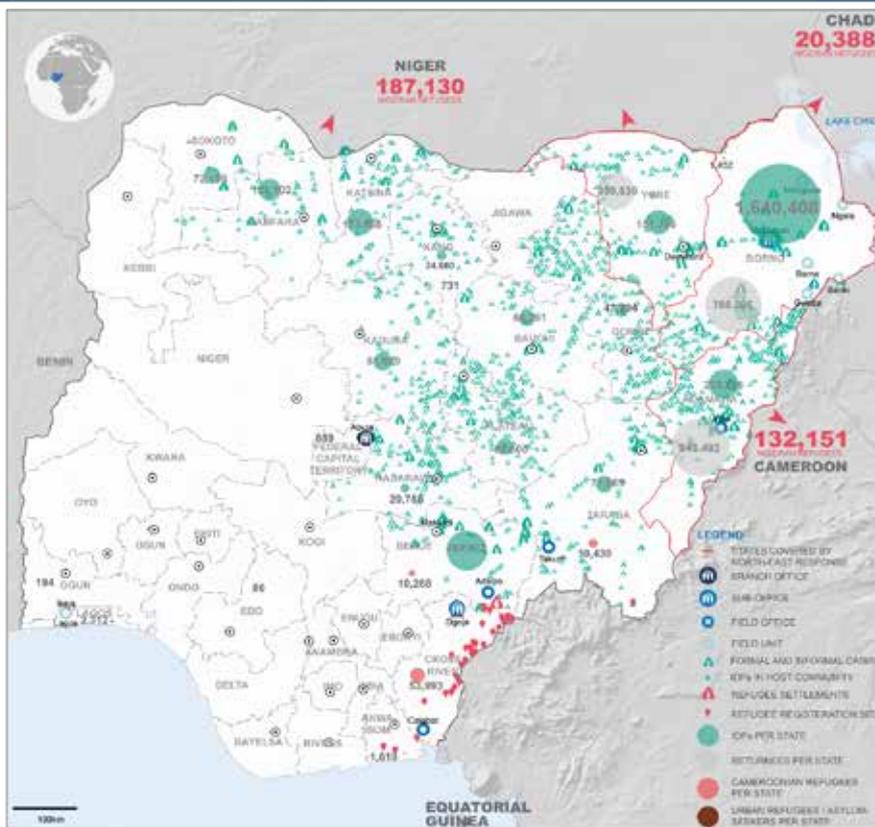
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS REGISTERED IN NIGERIA
Source: UNHCR December 2022.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The situation in the North-East remains largely volatile with attacks in several Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (BAY) States continuing to cause displacement and casualties among civilians, IDPs and returnees.

In addition, Cameroonian refugees affected by the crisis between the government and activists calling for secession of the anglophone region are seeking refuge in Nigeria. Their arrival has since presented a new dimension to the already complex humanitarian situation.

DISCLAIMER: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
PUBLISHED: January 2023 SOURCES: UNHCR, IOM DTM, HDX FEEDBACK: nigabim@unhcr.org WEBSITE: www.unhcr.org/nig



The herdsmen's violence against farmers has created a new humanitarian crisis in the Middle Belt region over the past five years. In its report UNHCR maps over 400,000 in the Benue State. However, according to Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State there are over two million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and 10,000 refugees from Cameroon in Benue¹⁷.

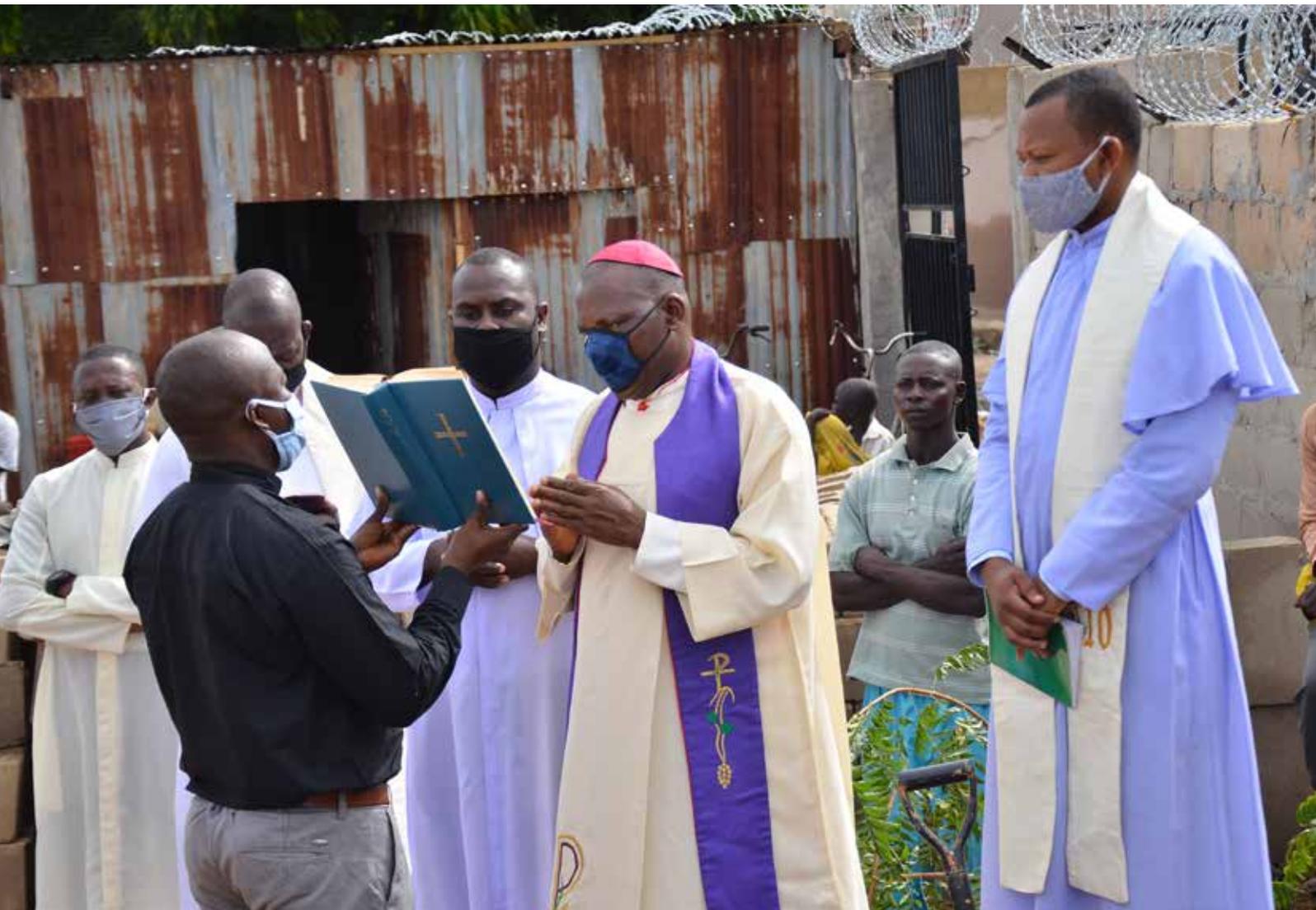
According to representatives of the diocese of Makurdi, located in Benue state, attacks by armed herdsmen (Fulani) – which take place almost weekly – have claimed many lives and properties and rendered countless people homeless, thereby forcing them to relocate the population to the 13 official Internally Displaced Person's (IDPs) camps in Benue state. Many others live with relatives in host communities and unofficial camps.

However, this tragedy is still largely ignored by the media and even by international aid agencies, much more focused on the serious situation in the northeast of the country. There are no comprehensive reports on the situation.

The local government area of Guma hosts most IDPs in Benue state. There are four camps (two in Daudu and one each in Ortese and Gbajimba) along with other hosting communities and unoffi-

cial camps. In addition, the area was badly affected by the October 2022 floods that destroyed many farms, houses and properties.

The combined effects of the attacks and displacement and the recent flood situation have worsened what were already precarious living conditions: "They are without food. They don't have a bed. People who used to fend for themselves now have to beg to eat, to feed themselves. The children in the camps are malnourished, some walk around naked. They don't even have a shirt to put on. They have not been able to go to school for many years. They cannot access medical care. They don't have water. They lack the basic things of life, such as where to live, where to shelter their heads. If you go to the IDP camps you will see the frustration because people just walk around until they get tired. And they sleep on the bare ground. This is the condition that human beings have been reduced to for many years. We are not talking about a year, we are talking about years, and nobody is talking about this situation. If they try to return to their farms, they are hunted like wild animals. So they are living in a cycle of hopelessness. They can't go to their farms. They live in the camps. They don't have access to anything", says Father Remigius Ihyula, project partner of ACN, in charge of the emergency relief program of the Diocese of Makurdi.





STORY

Refugees in Nigeria

“I don’t want there to be any night-time. I wish it was always daytime. My nights are full of fear, anxiety, nightmares”, says Naomi, a young Nigerian woman, and internal refugee. Like so many of her fellow compatriots in northeast Nigeria, Naomi relives the same nightmare every night: being abducted, the terrorists storming her town, forcing her to “marry” a Boko Haram terrorist or witnessing one of the extremist insurgents murdering someone in her family.

“I get frightened as soon as night falls”, this young woman confesses. She is just one of more than 30,000 internally displaced Nigerians in Pulka, close to the border with Cameroon and around 120 km from the city of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in northeast Nigeria.

Charles, a young father who is 33 and a refugee in the same place, also admits to having recurrent nightmares. *“I relive the time when we were living in hiding. Since the terrorists used to attack by night, we would get out of the town as soon as night began to fall and hide in the bush. Many nights I still dream that I’m in hiding”*, he explains ACN.

Both are now living next to the Alpha refugee camp in Pulka – just one of the 20 camps scattered across Borno State and one of six in the Gwoza district alone.

But the situation there is still very precarious. *“We were refugees in Cameroon, then we returned and have been living here for two years now, but the situation is still unsafe. We are once again living in our own country, in our own area, in our beloved Pulka, but we are living as refugees. We are nearer to our home than when we were living in Cameroon, but once again we are living in danger”*, says Charles.

“They can’t go far from the refugee camps, since their security cannot be guaranteed outside the camps. In any case, in the rainy season it is more difficult to move around. They go out to till their fields, because they have something to live on, but there are continuing attacks, and some people get killed. It is by no means easy, and it is not easy for me either, simply getting here. Coming and going is always a risk, but it is important to me to do everything I can to help these people”, Father Christopher explains. He continues to minister to the refugees, but he himself is living in an abandoned house, since Boko Haram destroyed the church and the presbytery in Pulka in 2014.



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/refugees-in-nigeria-jesus-christ-is-my-salvation-that-is-what-i-celebrate-at-christmas/>





5. ACN's help and projects

ACN is deeply involved in Nigeria, operating a large number of projects, which range from construction or reconstruction of infrastructure to formation and material support for priests, seminarians and other pastoral agents.

In the past five years: 2.8 million EUR were spent on construction and reconstruction and 2.5 million EUR for religious formation, most of it for priests and seminarians.

ACN also provides a platform of information about the suffering of Christians and helps local Church authorities to speak out at international events on issues such as religious freedom and Christian persecution.

For 2023 and beyond, ACN is planning an extensive program to respond to the needs of the Nigerian Church.

It will do so along 5 lines:

1. Keeping our Project Partners Safe
2. Building Peace through interreligious dialogue and formation
3. Caring for the victims of violence
4. Strengthening the Church in its Outreach
5. Supporting Prayer for Peace, Healing and Forgiveness

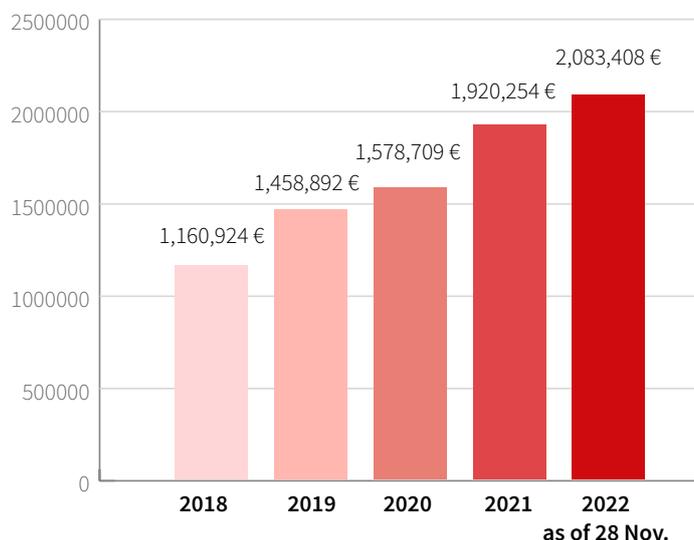
5.1. Overview of the last five years

From 2018 to 2022 (as of 28 Nov) ACN financed 637 projects in Nigeria, in different fields. During this period of time ACN's help amounted to 8.2 million euros.

ACN has supported the local Church, especially in the north of the country, which suffers from poverty and discrimination. For the past years the charity supported the reconstruction of Church properties destroyed by Islamist terrorists and trauma healing for the victims. In the south, the efforts of the pontifical foundation are focused on deepening spiritual formation through scholarships and training sessions.

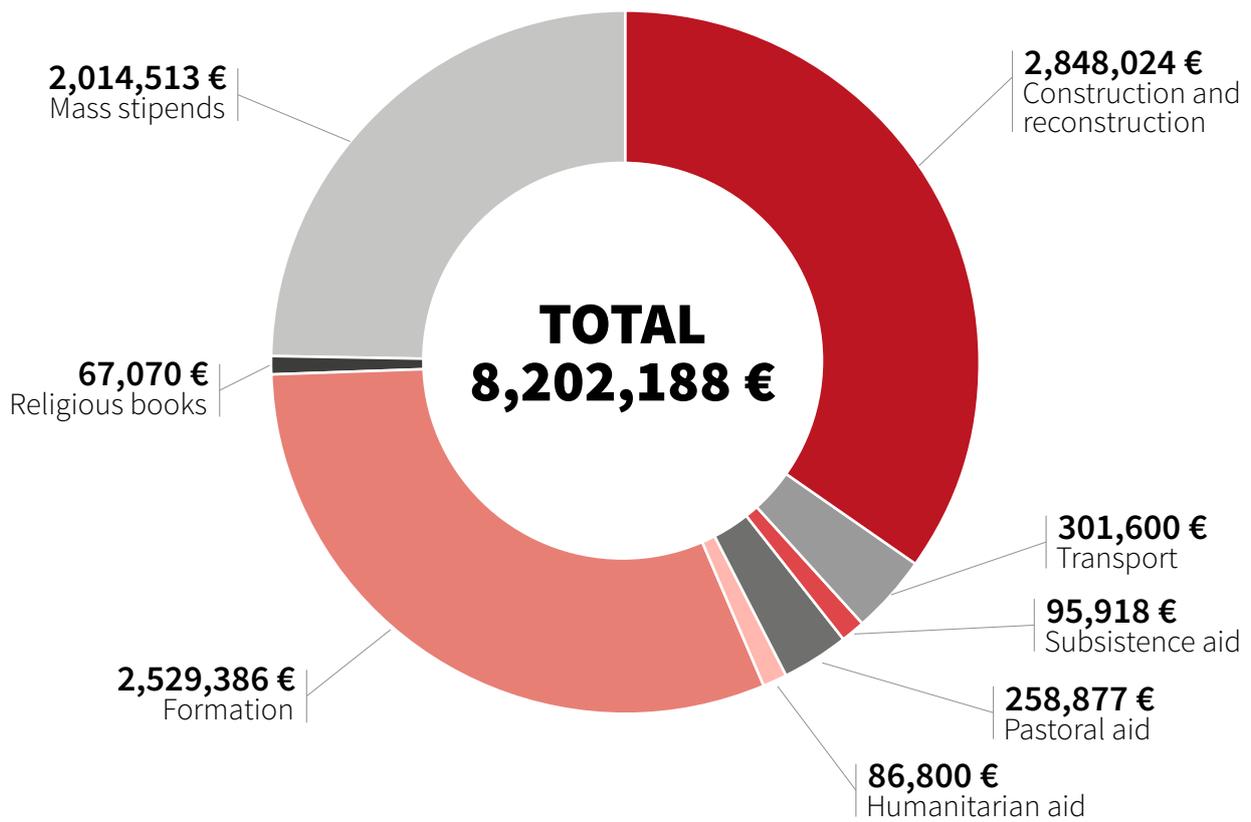
ACN's help for Nigeria in euros

(2018 - 2022 as of 28 Nov.)



ACN's Help for Nigeria by projects sector in euros

(2018 - 2022 as of 28 Nov.)



Number of Projects granted per kind of aid in 2022

(as of 28 Nov.)

✓ 130 Projects approvals

23

Construction and reconstruction

2

Emergency assistance

21

Training of priests

66

Mass stipends

23

Faith formation of laity

4

Existence help

1

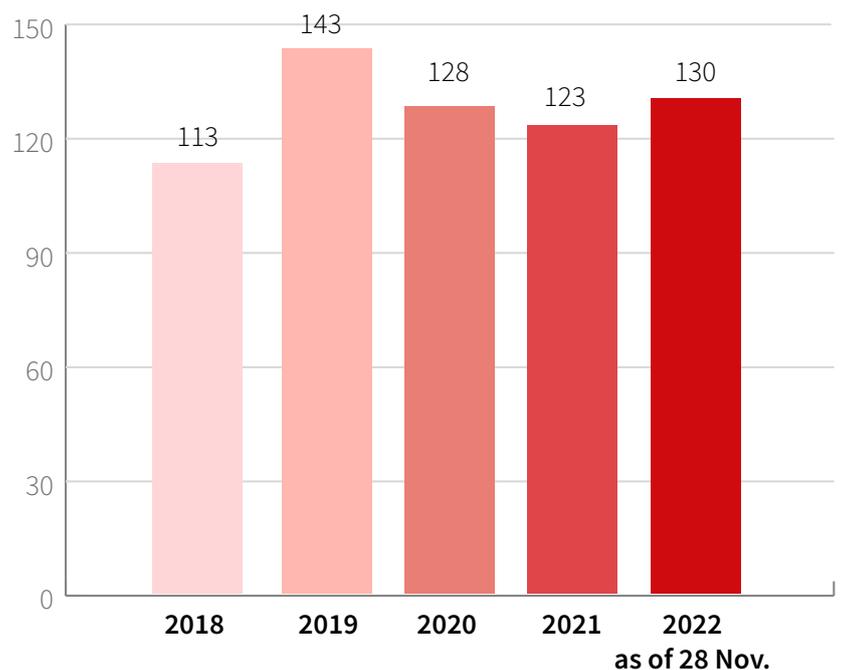
Distribution of Bibles

3

Means of transport

Number of projects

(2018 - 2022 as of 28 Nov.)





5.2. Examples of our help

A Trauma Centre for healing in Maiduguri - Caring for the wounded and traumatized

The threat of Boko Haram may have subsided from the Diocese of Maiduguri, and north-eastern Nigeria in general, but the horrors inflicted by the group remain in the forms of physical and mental wounds in the people who suffered.

Education is the main weapon in this new fight. “This is a priority for our diocese, especially for the refugees who have returned. We have taken it upon ourselves to make sure the children get an education, from primary school even, if possible, to university. This is key to defeating Boko Haram. When people have training to secure their livelihood, then they don’t go and kill people”, says Bishop Oliver Doeme.

Priests play a very important role in helping the local population, but the diocese is also concerned with the psychological well-being of its clergy. “One of the programs we have begun is trauma counselling for the priests. Our priests were invited to this trauma counselling and they returned very joyful and very thankful. Our female religious also went and returned strengthened.”

One of the most important areas in which the diocese invests is in promoting forgiveness, especially now that many Boko Haram members are being reintegrated into society. “On the feast of Our

Lady of Fatima, we reconsecrated our diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. People feel spiritually uplifted, and encouraged, and it makes them ready to forgive. People carry grudges against Boko Haram members who killed their loved ones, but they now have the ability to forgive. They see Jesus hanging on the cross, having forgiven his executioners, and they, too, gain the courage to forgive.”

Aid to the Church in Need has been a key partner in helping fund many of the projects the diocese is carrying out to restore dignity to its people and strengthen peace in the region. Many of the returning families require support to rebuild their lives, since the federal government has, according to the bishop, not lived up to its obligations in this field. These

projects range from material and psychological support for returnees, scholarships for children, financial aid for widows and orphans and also for priests and religious. “We are very thankful to ACN for this help”, says Bishop Oliver.

“We are weak, tired and scared. We hope God will fight for us”



Original article:

<https://acninternational.org/nigeria-we-are-weak-tired-and-scared-we-hope-god-will-fight-for-us/>





5.2. Examples of our help

Sturdy cars for priests ministering in an unsafe region

Pankshin is a young diocese in the central part of Plateau State, in North-Central Nigeria. Today, Pankshin diocese has 36 parishes and over 550 outstation churches. The diocese covers 8,486 square km, but due to the poor roads (less than 200 kilometers are paved) it can take up to four hours to travel from one part of the diocese to the other. The roads, mostly mountainous and rocky, are in deplorable conditions and are covered with potholes, and during the rainy season become muddy and difficult to drive on. The top average speed on the paved roads is about 50 km/h and 25 km/h on the rest of the unpaved roads that make up the vast majority in the diocese.

The security situation in the diocese is worsening, with the bishop describing it as follows: “One of our diocesan priests was kidnapped in October 2021, though he has now been freed, and the stories are devastating and worrisome. Generally, there is fear of attacks when you travel on lonely roads, especially when the vehicles used are not safe and break down. There is now a

culture of fear and discrimination in some places within the diocese. The Catholic Church, Christians of other denominations and Muslims tend to compete for followers.”

With the current waves of kidnapping and terrorist attacks, ACN is trying to do everything possible to ensure that priests and sisters in these remote areas have sturdy cars that will guarantee more safety as they travel past the bush and isolated areas of the diocese.



Cars for priests' security





5.2. Examples of our help

Addressing security challenges threatening the safety of religious sisters

In 1956 the Dominican missionary sisters were invited to build up a Christian presence in the Muslim dominated north-west of Nigeria. The sisters started to carry out the most needed work through education, healthcare, grass-roots evangelization and social work. In 1973, the sisters saw an urgent need to begin the formation of Nigerian Dominican sisters who know the language, needs and culture of the local population. This work bore fruit when in 1997 the missionary sisters decided to hand over full leadership of the Nigerian Congregation to the local sisters in Gusau.

The sisters are fostering dialogue with people of different faiths and tribes, as well as initiating and promoting ways to support and care for spiritually, morally and economically deprived youth. They build communities which encourage relationships of truth, unity and justice.

Over the past years the various conflicts in Nigeria (especially in the northern part) have escalated. The area where the convent is situated has not been spared. The sisters report cases of bandits abducting people from their homes and places of

work. The security threats have made the Dominican sisters realize the urgent need to protect the convent in order to deter bandits.

Sr Justina concludes: “We are touching many lives of both Christians and Muslims. Despite the insecurity and challenges that we face, our community life keeps us together. It has been a source of joy and strength.”

“Despite the insecurity and challenges that we face, our community life keeps us together. It has been a source of joy and strength”

The sisters in Zuru are also worried about increased insecurity in their region. Sr Nancy explains that there have been reports of killings of both civilians and military, including parents or guardians of some of their own pupils.

“There has been massive displacement of people from their homes, they can no longer freely go to their farms which are the major source of livelihood, and the places of worship are also deserted. Life has been so difficult for many, and there has been an increase of burglary, prostitution and so on. Therefore, we are asking for support to fortify the fences of our community as we continue to pray for God’s protection over us all”, Sr Nancy writes to ACN.



5.2. Examples of our help

Support for Internally Displaced People in Borno and Benue state

Educating Children who fled from Boko Haram

The refugees in Pulka belong to the Mandala tribe, and, before the Boko Haram insurgency started, lived in small villages next to Pulka, 20 km from the border with Cameroon. In 2013, when Boko Haram arrived in the region, many decided to flee to the surrounding mountains. When the fighting got closer, they crossed the border with Cameroon and settled in camps in the diocese of Maroua-Mokolo where they stayed from August 2014 to May 2017. When the situation appeared to have calmed, many refugees returned from Cameroon, trying to reach their villages. This was not always possible, either for security reasons or because the villages were destroyed. Many of them decided to settle in Pulka where the Nigerian army provides security. Today, 90% of them live in the four camps near the city.

The project aims to help the diocese of Maiduguri pay school fees for 700 internally displaced children from the Pulka community: 425 girls and 275 boys.

Ensuring the Basic Needs of the IDPs Living in Guma

This project seeks to provide 2,500 IDPs in the camps in Guma Local Government Area with blankets and sleeping mats to improve their living condition. The target beneficiaries will include pregnant and nursing mothers, IDPs with disabilities, children between the ages of 3-10 and elderly men and women aged 60 and above. The beneficiaries will be profiled, selected, and short-listed according to the aforementioned selection criteria.



Assistance to internally displaced persons





5.2. Examples of our help

Eucharistic Adoration Centre to give Hope to traumatised Christians

The diocese of Sokoto has remained at the heart of the persecutions. These have notoriously taken the shape of the burning and destruction of Churches as well as businesses and properties belonging to Christians.

Some incidents pose a very serious challenge to the faith of the people. One was the brutal murder of Michael Nnadi two years ago. The young seminarian from Sokoto had come to the Major Seminary of Kaduna to become a priest. After being kidnapped he summoned the courage to call his murderers to conversion from their evil ways, and for this he paid the ultimate price. Another testimony of faith was Mrs. Bolanle Ataga, a Catholic mother who was also violently murdered for refusing to give in to the sexual demands of the gang leaders who abducted her.

In May 2021, two priests, Msgr. Joseph Keke and Fr Alphonsus Bello, were abducted from their presbytery in Malumfashi. The first was released after three weeks in captivity but Fr Alphonsus was killed on the Parish premises on that same night.

The Catholic Bishop's Conference is working to possibly present these two victims as "Martyrs of Nigeria" in the near future, but meanwhile, in the Diocese of Sokoto, Bishop Kukah and the faithful he serves want to set in motion an initiative to encourage and deepen the faith of grieving Christians by

building a place where the suffering people can bring their pain, their prayers and find healing in God's merciful love: "It is truly the fulfilment of the dictum that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Christian faith".

With the help of ACN benefactors, the faithful will be able to gather at this Eucharistic Adoration Centre in Malumfashi, Katsina State, in the Sokoto Diocese, built to honor those who died for the sake of their Christian faith, at the hands of Muslim extremists.



Original articles:

<https://acninternational.org/nigeria-homily-at-the-funeral-mass-of-seminarian-michael-nnadi/>

<https://acninternational.org/a-homily-delivered-by-most-rev-matthew-man-oso-ndagoso-at-the-funeral-mass-of-late-rev-fr-alphonsus-bello/>

<https://acninternational.org/nigeria-bishop-seeks-release-of-75-year-old-priest-from-kidnappers/>



**Martyrs
Remembrance
Center**



SOURCES

Unless otherwise stated, the information in this document has been compiled by Aid to the Church in Need using information obtained during research trips and interviews with local partners over the past 6 years.

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PRAYER FOR NIGERIA

All powerful and merciful Father, You are the God of Justice, Love and Peace You rule over all Nations on the earth. Power and Might are in Your hands and no one can withstand you.

We present our country Nigeria before You. We praise and thank You for You are the source of all we have and are. We are sorry for all the sins we have committed and for the good deeds we failed to do.

In Your loving forgiveness, keep us safe from the punishments we deserve. Lord, we are weighed down not only by uncertainties, but also by moral, economic, and political problems. Listen to the cries of your people who confidently turn to you. God of infinite goodness, our strength in adversity, our health in weakness, our comfort in sorrow, be merciful to us our people. Spare this nation Nigeria from chaos, anarchy and doom.

Bless us with your kingdom of Justice, Love and Peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Our Lady Queen of Nigeria, pray for us.

This prayer, composed by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) to unite the Christians in prayer during difficult times, is prayed today by Catholics at the end of each Holy Mass in Nigeria

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