

Peoples under Threat

Indigenous Ethnic Minorities under Threat in Nigeria

Research by World Watch Monitor published July 13th 2015, purports that:

“In the central part of Nigeria, the Middle Belt, there have been ongoing conflicts with considerable effects on the society that have only sporadically and haphazardly been reported. The conflict that involves Boko Haram, and other radical Islamic groups, has a religious dimension, which makes it more complicated to deal with. The leaders of Boko Haram have repeatedly reiterated that they want to establish a caliphate of their own.

However, the ongoing conflicts in north eastern states and the Middle Belt are always characterized differently, i.e. “due to social and environmental justice.” However, there are no analyses or opinions about the victims of those conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt region of the country.

Of course it is within the nature of conflicts to confuse, to mislead and at times to lead to an incomplete analysis and hence incomplete “solutions.” In today’s world, where political correctness massively affects the way analysts communicate about certain things, missing very crucial points has become apparent. This is particularly true when it comes to conflict and the religious component of it. The religious aspect of conflicts might be avoided in order not to further escalate the situations or not to offend partners. However, such an approach cannot be a viable option, as solving conflicts demands comprehensive understanding of the causes, the parties and all characteristics of a given conflict.”

Commenting on the issues relating to this discuss, while in Nigeria for a two-day official visit in August 2015 the U.N chief, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon points out that “across our world, we see insecurity, inequality, growing divides. Here in Nigeria, you know the challenges all too well - including the rise of

extremism and the lack of equal opportunity. I know this is a deep and vital challenge....”

In the light of the aforementioned, within nine months in 2015 over 800 lives are lost to terror at Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas (LGAs) alone in Plateau State. Also, across Nigeria (north to south), over the past weeks there have been reports of different attacks by terrorists Fulani marauders in Abia, Benue, Delta, Edo, Enugu, and Nasarawa states, killing several people and leaving many missing and unaccounted for. Despite the obvious physical and ruthless nature of these attacks, the media, government of Nigeria and its security institutions releases out statements and headlines about the attackers as suspected Fulani marauders. While the ‘suspected Fulani fanatics’ in their hundreds had invaded communities in states across Nigeria shouting ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (*in Arabic meaning there’s no God but Allah; also meaning Allah is great*), shooting, looting, burning houses and killing local people. It appears phoney and bizarre that Nigeria’s government and media having ‘identified’ the attackers as ‘Fulani marauders’, they continually claim that the attackers (‘suspects’ of such dastardly acts) are ‘unidentified’. It suffices to say that there is no deliberate potent measure put in place by the government to prosecute or convict the culprits. It is clear that ‘unidentified’ persons cannot be legally brought to justice.

President Buhari was inaugurated on May 29th 2015, however, Boko Haram’s extreme threats and devastating attacks are on the increase in north-eastern Nigeria and the Middle-Belt. According to Dr Khataza Gondwe “We're talking about 750 people dead [in north eastern Nigeria]- at least - since the new President was inaugurated on May 29th. This is little over a month and the killings are continuing - so it's a very real threat." Interestingly, the devastating security situation in north-eastern Nigeria seems to have caused Buhari to wake up to the challenge. Consequently, people have accused Buhari of giving attention to the north-eastern part of the country, as it is perceived that the activities of Boko-Haram and other Islamists are as well eminently beginning to affect ‘moderate’ Muslims (including Mr Buhari’s

Hausa/Fulani tribesmen, the way ISIS is killing other Muslims) who perceive Islamists and the activities of Jihadists as ‘un-Islamic’.

The persistent attacks on Beroms- Middle Belt ethnic and religious minorities, Christian communities in Plateau State, and elsewhere in Nigeria where innocent citizens are reportedly assassinated, particularly targeted, waylaid and reportedly killed because of their ethnic, political and religious beliefs supports the evidence that Islamic militia across the globe can no longer co-exist peacefully with anyone who opposes their radical ‘Salafist jihadism’ ideology.

It’s disheartening that Al-Qaeda, Al-shabaab, Boko-Haram and the likes in their quest for supremacy use religion to justify their appalling ideology of destroying human life. Evidently, just as with Islamic State (ISIS /ISIL and Boko Haram), extremist Fulani militias’ intention among several others is for territorial expansion through, for example, grazing reserves to serve as their political stronghold. This is what some experts called ‘political jihad’. This occupation by extremist Fulanis continue, and they are gaining grounds by killing and displacing ethnic minorities in Nigeria from their native and inherited lands. The Beroms, Binis, Daguzas, Dukawas, Eggons, Ezzas, Ezilos, Gbagys, Idomas, Igumales, Ijaws, Isokos, Itsekiris, Kilbas, Kagoros, Nimzongs, Mabuzawas, Madas, Margis, Siyawas, Tangales, Tivs, Urawas, Urhobos, Zurus,etc who are ethnic minorities in Nigeria, have all at one time or another, tasted the bitter attacks of radical Hausa/Fulani pastoralists and Boko Haram militias.

It should be clear at this juncture to note that there is no particular opinion held here that suggests that ethnic minorities in Nigeria consider the whole race of the Hausa and Fulani pastoralists, and ethnic nationality as Islamists. However, the root cause of the appalling activities perpetrated by Boko-Haram, Hausa jihadists and extremist Fulani pastoralists against ethnic and religious minorities in Middle-Belt and across Nigeria suggests that Islamists are intrinsically inspired by radical Islamic political

ideology as purported by the expansionist principle of the type of Islam they claim to profess.

In support of this position, a research by The Analytical, on Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies, in Middle Belt Nigeria, points out that Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen and settlers have been behind many atrocities that could be equivalent to the violence being orchestrated by Boko Haram.

Contrary to the weight of evidence pointing to the unabated jihadists attacks on indigenous ethnic communities, coupled with terrorism across Nigeria, particularly in the Middle-Belt and southern Nigeria, president Buhari's body language seems to suggest his strong bias for his religious inclinations and ethnic affiliation. It is surprising for a person like Mr Buhari who constantly talks of 'change', security stability and 'fight against corruption' to not consider attempting to solve the lingering ethnic cleansing ravaging the unity and stability of the country he governs. As usual President Muhammadu Buhari and his spokespersons up till this day have not issued out any statement condemning the attacks on ethnic and religious minorities in Nigeria, and/or proffer any workable solution as he's doing for the north-east case. Mr Buhari's apparent inaction and insensitivity to the issues happening to ethnic and religious minorities in Nigeria seems to suggest that the Middle-Belt ethnic minorities are not on his priority list.

Despite president Buhari's promise of 'wiping out Boko Haram in two months', emphasising that "Boko Haram will soon know the strength of our collective unity", Boko Haram & Islamist Fulanis continue to attack Nigerians, villages, places of worship, ethnic and religious minorities living across communities in Nigeria. Agatu, Boboroku, Jol, Ropp, Sho, Sopp, Foron, Gashish, Rakung, Kadunung, Kassa, Kwok, Fan, Ohoro, Top, Uwheru, Ohoro communities in Benue, Delta, Nassarawa, Plateau State among others are examples of the affected communities. It is perceived that the president of Nigeria remains silent, perhaps because these communities are not in

north-eastern Nigeria, and figures seem to suggest that the Hausa/Fulanis are not affected much as other ethnic and religious minorities!

Here, it is worthy to mention that ethnic and religious minority tribes in Nigeria are constantly being displaced due to these attacks. According to UNICEF Report the number of displaced children forced to flee Islamists insurgency in Nigeria hits 1.4 million. The UN Agency added that around 500,000 were displaced in the last five months, after a sharp rise in attacks by terrorist groups.

Meanwhile, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has said that the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as at July 2015 has increased to 2.1 million from 1.5 million. As it stands out, this figure is more than the entire population of Northern Ireland, United Kingdom.

It is disheartening that most local and foreign media do not broadcast the devastation the crimes against humanity perpetrated by radical Fulani pastoralists and their affiliates have caused indigenous people. Unlike the ‘three major ethnic groups’ in Nigeria (i.e Hausa/Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba), other minority ethnic groups in relation to Nigeria’s population as a state have now become ‘stateless’ as they can no longer hold claim to any land or state in Nigeria once they fled from their ancestral homes. This is compounded by the issue of citizenship as enshrined in Nigeria’s Constitution. Nigeria’s Constitution suggests that a person’s ‘indigeneship’ (local ethnic origin) sovereignly grants that individual the right to citizenship. However, being able to exercise full citizenship rights in Nigeria depends on an indigene’s influence-affiliation or lineage to a major Nigerian ethnic group. It’s no surprise that the UN chief, Ban Ki-moon succinctly summarised it as “...*Here in Nigeria, you know the challenges all too well...*”.

Arguably, some analysts are of the view that why attacks on ethnic minorities particularly those in Middle-Belt Nigeria are not getting the needed local and

international attention and documentation is because the Middle-Belt ethnic groups do not form part of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria or in Africa, for instance, as the Huasas, Fulanis, Yorubas across Africa.

Therefore, as a deliberate, though precarious effort, in the hope that ethnic minorities in Nigeria want to retain the claim to their towns of origin and ethnic identity, these ethnic groups like the Beroms, Idomas, Tiv, Gbagis, Tangales, etc have resort to remain in their ‘native/ancestral homeland’ despite being constantly subjected to maiming, genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and heinous unabated attacks. All in the hope that this approach may save them from complete annihilation.

As major constitutional ethnic groups in Nigeria, Ibos and Yorubas who were once domiciled in parts of northern Nigeria may find it ‘easily’ to relocate to their respective homelands-‘states of origin’ where they form majority. Whereas, ethnic minorities in Nigeria have no such choice if the untold hardships associated to the issue of citizenship is taken into full account. An alternative or extremely harsh ‘choice’ for ethnic minorities in Nigeria is for them to either choose to stay-put in their ancestral hometowns (where they are in a majority) despite the awful attacks on them and their leaders, or they decide through forced migration to become ‘refugees’ probably second class (micro-minority group) citizens in their own country considering their individual circumstances as IDP’s and perceived settlers.

Even without fanatical religious attacks on Nigeria’s religious minorities regardless of their religious belief, identity or political affiliation, ‘settlers’ particularly ethnic minorities in Nigeria remain under slave like conditions in a country they call theirs. Ethnic minorities outside their local communities face untold unending hardships, and most often experience life threatening situations, discrimination, extreme prejudice due to their ethnicity and perhaps religion.

In proffering solution to the security challenge in Nigeria, many people including ‘country experts’ are of the view that the conflicts in the Middle-Belt Nigeria are due to cattle rustling, farming or grazing activities. Well, as complex as the issue appears to be, it would also be of interest to take into consideration that the people, villages and communities experiencing constant attacks, and the killing of its peoples (including women and children) during these prolong crises, completely have no involvement with cattle duffing.

Furthermore, evidence (which many people including conflict ‘experts’ failed to acknowledge) revealed the causes behind the conflict. The findings contest the most popular belief about the conflict: that it is only due to social justice [‘settlership/indigeneship’, ‘political jihad’] and environmental degradation- including grazing, farming and cattle raiding issues. Worthy to note, some of the victims are foetuses (some even zygotes) still in their pregnant mothers’ wombs, and majority are toddlers and babies- zero month old- far younger than Aylan Kurdi (the drowned refugee boy from Kobane, Syria who died alongside his brother and mother in the Mediterranean) that received lots of media attention and publicity.

Pathetically, the attacks in Middle-Belt (North-Central Nigeria) on ethnic and religious minorities like the Beroms, Idomas, Tiv, Jukuns etcetera is not receiving proportionate attention and balanced media report as for the drowned refugee boy from Kobane, Syria. This perceived imbalanced reports and misrepresentation of evidence by main stream print, web and electronic media in Europe like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has prompted the leadership of the Berom Youth Movement (BYM) a leading voice against Hausa/Fulani domination of ethnic minorities in North-Central Nigeria, to respond accordingly.

In one of BYM’s usual [press release](#) on Friday 18th September 2015 (please follow the web [link](#)), the BYM alleges that despite the overwhelming evidence and record of events as supported by statistics, “*BBC’s assertion [about the crisis in the Middle-Belt*

(North Central States of Nigeria), particularly in Plateau, relating to the recent Kadunung attacks] is not just false but misleading and aimed at steering conflict amongst Plateau indigenes to enable the Jihadists sail with their expansionist mission”.

But again, people may tend to ask, what can the wail of foul or misery by an unfamiliar ethnic minority group such as the Berom Youth Movement (BYM) cause to a behemoth and leviathan establishment as the BBC, and or other European media? Only time would tell, as it appears at the moment, European mainstream media only responds to the plights of major ethnic or religious groups who find themselves becoming a ‘minority group’ amongst Africa’s religious or indigenous ethnic minorities.

As complex as the situation now is, the association between terrorism, violence, territorial expansion or land grabbing, and security is so strong, it can blind us to the dangers of land/grazing legislation in the quest for finding a ‘solution’ to the conflict. It is believed that most Nigerians regardless of their political, religious or ethnic backgrounds desperately and genuinely yearn for peaceful co-existence. But so long as Nigeria (Nigerians) and the world want to appear ‘politically correct’ or insensitive on this issue by remaining ‘naïve’ to the ulterior motives behind the clarion calls by Islamists/fundamentalists, ethnic chauvinists, and the advocacy by some politicians in government championing the course for land law reforms and grazing reserves that will only be in favour of the major ethnic tribes in Nigeria or Africa, Nigeria will never experience oneness and true peace.

Furthermore, to help put an end to this cycle of violence, if among several other policies or legislations there is going to be any consideration for grazing reserves and land law reforms as a means to solving part of Nigeria’s security and terror problems, the government of Nigeria under president Buhari should consider instead ‘animal husbandry or livestock rearing laws’. Nigerians want and will appreciate Animal

husbandry or land reforms laws that will accommodate all forms of ‘animal farming’, taking into consideration the plights of ethnic and religious minorities across Nigeria. Land and grazing reforms that only focuses on the interest and protection of a ‘select few’ – that is citizens who are busy autonomously, through ‘conquest’ caving out territories for grazing reserves and who form part of the major ethnic groups in the country and across West Africa, believing that herding cattle is their exclusive right would be injurious to Nigeria’s unity and stability.

However, land reform and animal husbandry law for ALL FARM ANIMALS will truly reflect Nigeria’s diverse indigenous interests as it will ensure that no minority is deprived of their territory in the name of grazing reserve. This way, resource distribution and power allocation among regions and ethnic groups would have statutory backing as ethnic minorities would not be intimidated, discriminated or persecuted by any major religious or ethnic groups in Nigeria. Despite land/grazing reform potential as a solution to the lingering ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, It has been observed that the despicable attacks by Islamist Fulani raiders across communities in Nigeria are as a result of the perceived believe that grazing reserve law is exclusively favouring Fulanis rearing cattle, while giving other farmers and local peoples interested in the breeding and keeping of other animals less rights and protection.

More to that, the Hausa/Fulani controlled areas particularly in Northern Nigeria always put the Sharia law supreme over Nigeria’s Constitution in relation to their fundamental human rights to religion and land ownership against other ethnic or religious minorities living amongst them, but expect to be treated differently if they find themselves living in states not controlled by Sharia law. As such, the Latin phrase “Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes” becomes relevant especially if the idea of land ownership supported by Sharia is not considered vis-à-vis Nigeria’s Constitution. “Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes” is paraphrased in English as the proverb "Beware of Greeks [Danaans] bearing gifts". Its literal meaning as it relates to the Trojan Horse

and the Battle of Troy is "I fear the Danaans [Greeks], even those bearing gifts" or "even when they bear gifts".

Therefore, the Government should be properly guided; a situation whereby the voices of proponents of grazing reserves and land law reforms are louder goes to support the perpetrators of the violence to continue their carnage in our societies by trying to sustain their insatiable desire by stylishly 'legitimizing' the creation of a path leading to the grabbing of more lands and territories as ISIS is doing in the Middle East. Left with no choice at this juncture the phrase "do not trust the horse, Trojans! Whatever it is, I fear the Danaans, even when bringing gifts" keeps popping out as a cautionary warning particularly when it is chiefly the perpetrators of violence against ethnic minorities in Nigeria are proposing for grazing reserve and land law reforms.

Nevertheless, in the path of exploring for peace, safety and reconciliation, if land and/or grazing reform is to be considered as an approach in resolving the conflict, it should be done in a way suggested here, that will not turn out to be a "Trojan Horse" used against Nigeria's ethnic minorities.

For the sake of the persecuted ethnic minorities in Nigeria, equal opportunity, equality and protection of international human rights requires the international community to intervene in this situation, even if it will only add its voice at the same level it responded to the case of the Mbororo Fulanis, Yazidis, Shia and Sunni Muslims in the Cameroons, Middle East, and the Rohingya ethnic minority group in Asia. But people would perhaps continue to wonder why foreign governments like the United Kingdom are not offering or considering offering any form of 'logistic support' similar to the one it offered minorities in Syria and Iraq, to ethnic minorities in the Middle-Belt of Nigeria who at the moment are experiencing ethnic cleansing! How have ethnic minorities in Middle-Belt Nigeria, e.g. the Beroms benefited from UK's foreign policy as it relates to the crisis that engulfs the region and its people?

Morality and humanity demand that people in crisis regardless of their religious belief, race or ethnic backgrounds deserve help and protection. Ethnic minorities in Nigeria are in a desperate situation and need a strong voice.

BYM PRESS RELEASE FRIDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2015

<https://plateaunewsonline.wordpress.com/2015/09/19/berom-youth-movement-issued-a-press-release-on-the-ongoing-bloodshed-in-berom-land/>