

ARISE AFRICA

NIGERIA AT THE CROSSROADS

Is there a future
for Nigeria's
displaced church?
SEPTEMBER 2026



ServAfrica in partnership with Open Doors and African Enterprise International

Executive overview

Nigeria stands at a crossroads.

This brief explores trends that point to two divergent futures: one in which violence continues to escalate, deepening displacement and suffering for all communities, including Christians, and another in which strengthened government action, supported by sustained international engagement, begins to reverse cycles of insecurity and open a path toward stability and the return of internally displaced people.

Recent data on violence presents a mixed but concerning picture. After a period of relative stabilisation, killings and abductions appear to be rising again, with sharp increases recorded in late 2025. While Christians continue to be affected profoundly, the violence is increasingly impacting Muslim communities as well, reflecting a shifting and complex pattern of conflict driven by ethno-religious, economic and environmental factors. The scale and spread of violence, particularly involving Fulani militant groups alongside Boko Haram and Islamic State – West Africa Province (ISWAP), continues to drive widespread insecurity and displacement.

At the same time, there are tentative signs of positive change. Increased international attention, particularly from the United States, has coincided with renewed actions by the Nigerian government, including security reforms, arrests and prosecutions. However, these steps remain limited relative to the scale of the crisis, and it is not yet clear whether they represent the beginning of sustained accountability or a shorter-term gesture.

The humanitarian consequences remain severe. Internal displacement remains persistently high, with nearly four million people displaced within Nigeria. Many live in precarious conditions, either in under-resourced camps or in host communities already under strain. For many, especially in North-Central regions, repeated cycles of displacement, land occupation by perpetrators, and ongoing insecurity make return almost impossible. While some initiatives offer hope, such as legal reforms, resettlement programmes, and localised return efforts, these remain small-scale and under-funded.

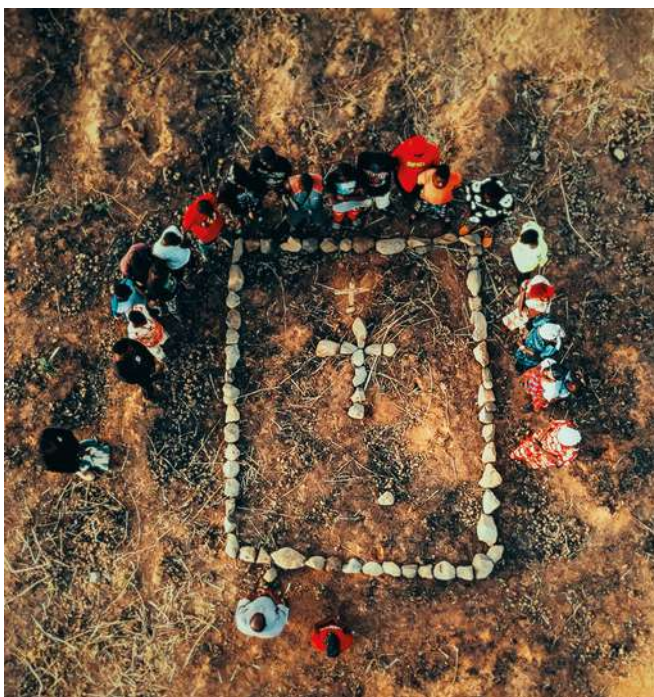
For the church in northern Nigeria, these dynamics are reshaping its very presence. Entire communities have been uprooted, churches destroyed or abandoned, and congregations displaced into urban centres. While the resilience of the church is evident, the long-term impact includes demographic shifts, financial strain, and the increasing fragility of rural Christian life.

Nigeria's future now depends on choices made by multiple actors. If current trends of violence and impunity continue, displacement will deepen and the prospects for return will recede further. But if Nigerian government efforts to address insecurity are strengthened and sustained, supported by consistent international pressure and partnership, there remains a pathway toward greater security, justice, and a genuine 'road home' for displaced communities.

Introduction

No Road Home, published in 2024 by Open Doors, the World Evangelical Alliance and International Institute for Religious Freedom, relayed the experiences of Christian internally displaced people (IDPs) in Nigeria. It described how extremist violence across parts of the country over the previous decade has resulted in mass displacement of Christian communities, amongst others. This includes in the northern state of Borno where Islamist militants thrive and target Christians, and in Plateau state, where violence perpetrated by militant members of the Fulani people group has uprooted Christian communities. The report illustrated the specific vulnerabilities of displaced Christians, with many singled out for violence, facing harsh living conditions and experiencing faith-based challenges throughout their displacement journey. In the words of one IDP interviewed for the report, “The global church needs to know that many people are displaced. The global church needs to pray for the people to be able to return.”

Two years on, the situation of Christians in Nigeria has attracted greater international attention. There have been other shifts in the complex factors that gave rise to the violence that affects both Christians and non-Christians. This brief explores what current trends indicate about the future of the displaced church in Nigeria. Will Christians in northern Nigeria continue to be displaced with many permanently exiled from their land, or is there a ‘road home’ and a brighter future for them and all the communities in northern Nigeria that have been impacted by the violence? There are mixed signals, suggesting Nigeria is at a crossroads and the road taken depends on the actions of the Nigerian government, the international community and the church in Nigeria and globally.



A mass grave of 22 people killed by extremists in northern Nigeria

This brief first explores the trends in the violence that drives displacement, before turning to the evolving national and international factors that shape these patterns of violence. The brief then explores the impact on the numbers of IDPs and their conditions and prospects for return, before turning to the long-term prospects of the church in northern Nigeria and recommendations for the actions required to pave the road toward IDP returns and long-term security.

Violence trends and causes

Violence in Nigeria impacts millions of Nigerians’ lives deeply as well as its wider society and politics and how the country is perceived internationally. Measurement of the violence, particularly when assessing how different religious groups are affected, is therefore methodologically challenging as well as politically sensitive. This brief aims to bring together the best available data to explore what the current trajectory is, and this section on violence draws primarily on reports by the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA).¹ ORFA collects data from primary (in country network) sources and secondary sources such as ACLED², and categorises the victims of violence according to religious identity in order to report how different religious communities are affected. While there are limitations when treated as a snapshot, the consistency of approach taken by ORFA over time enables an analysis of trends. The ORFA data covers from 1 October 2019 to 31 December 2025, a six-and-a-quarter year period. ORFA uses the US government fiscal year from 1 October to 30 September to organise data, and this brief combines the data published in their six-year report³ (covering the period through to September 2025) with provisional numbers shared by ORFA for the quarter October to December 2025.

¹ [Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa](#)

² [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data](#)

³ [ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria \(2020–2025\)](#), June 2026.



... there has been a sharp increase in the killings since October 2025

Pastor Josiah from northern Nigeria overlooking the valley

Numbers of killings and abductions

The dataset distinguishes between killings of civilians, the military and terror groups and Figure 1 illustrates the trend in total civilian killings over the reporting period.

Levels of civilian killings have fluctuated between October 2019 and December 2025. They peaked in FY 2021 and levelled off between FY 2023 and FY 2025. Extrapolating from the first quarter of FY 2026, it looks as though there may be an increase again.⁴ Given that killings can follow seasonal patterns, comparing a quarter against the same quarter in the previous year is a more reliable indicator. The total for October

to December 2025 (1,735) is 51% higher than the 1,148 civilian killings recorded in October to December 2024.

The trend for abductions differs in part. Figure 2 illustrates how, having increased quickly in FY 2021, the total has stayed relatively steady at that level. However, extrapolating from the first quarter of FY 2026, as with killings, there has been a sharp increase since October 2025.⁵ In the October to December 2025 quarter, compared to the same period for the previous year, there was a 153% increase from 1,352 to 3,415.

November 2025 was a particularly violent month, featuring mass abductions of school students and teachers⁶ leading to a general shut down of schools in about 11 states in northern Nigeria.⁷

Figure 1: Total civilians killed October 2019 – December 2025

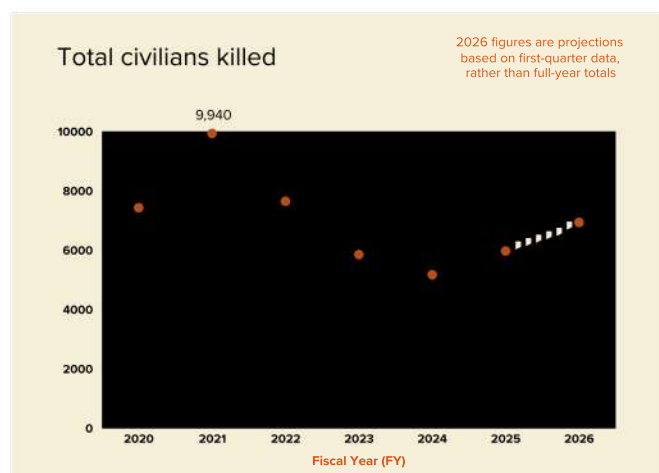
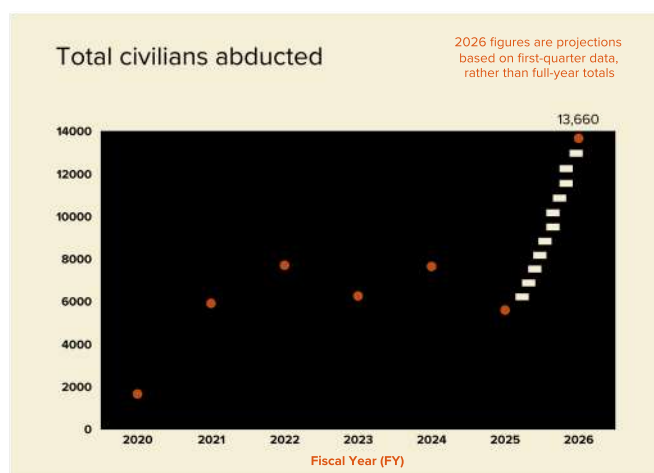


Figure 2: Total civilians abducted October 2019 – December 2025



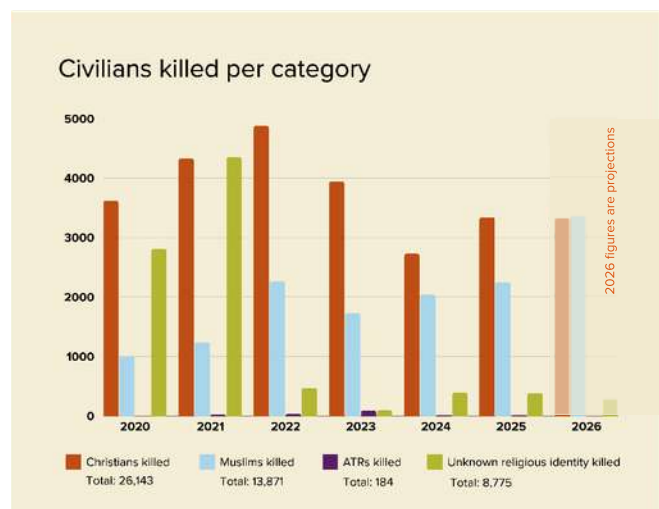
⁴ The quarterly total was multiplied by four to create a prediction for the whole of 2026. For the previous six years, this October to December quarter normally had a lower level of killings as there appear seasonal variations in killings. So this is a conservative estimate: the 2026 total might be higher if the same pattern of higher totals in other quarters is repeated.

⁵ As with the killings total, this total of abductions was multiplied by four to create a prediction for 2026. There are fewer quarterly variations for abductions compared to killings.

⁶ Reliefweb, *Nigeria - Attack on school in the Northwest*, 24 November 2025; CNN, *Gunmen kidnap 25 schoolgirls from Nigerian school, kill vice principal*, 17 November 2025; The Guardian, *Security fears rise in Nigeria after more than 300 schoolchildren kidnapped*, 22 November 2025.

⁷ International Crisis Group, *Schools Shut Down across Northern Nigeria in Wake of Mass Abductions*, 26 November 2025.

Figure 3: Civilians killed by religious identity of victim (October 2019 – December 2025)

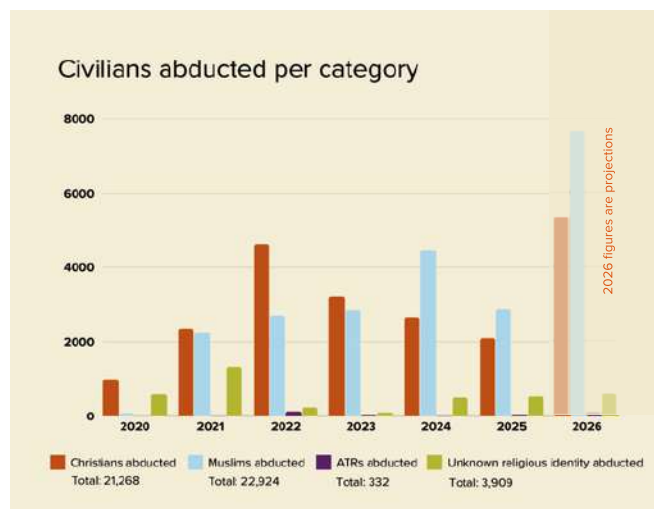


Religious identity of civilian victims

The ORFA data enables analysis of trends in the religious identity of civilian victims. There is no equivalent breakdown of military or terror group victims. Figure 3 compares whether civilian victims were Christian, Muslim, adherents to African Traditional Religion (ATR) or of unknown religious identity. This brief does not claim that religious identity is the sole factor in who is affected by violence. Perpetrators' motives are difficult to prove and may be mixed, with victims' religious identity one factor among others.

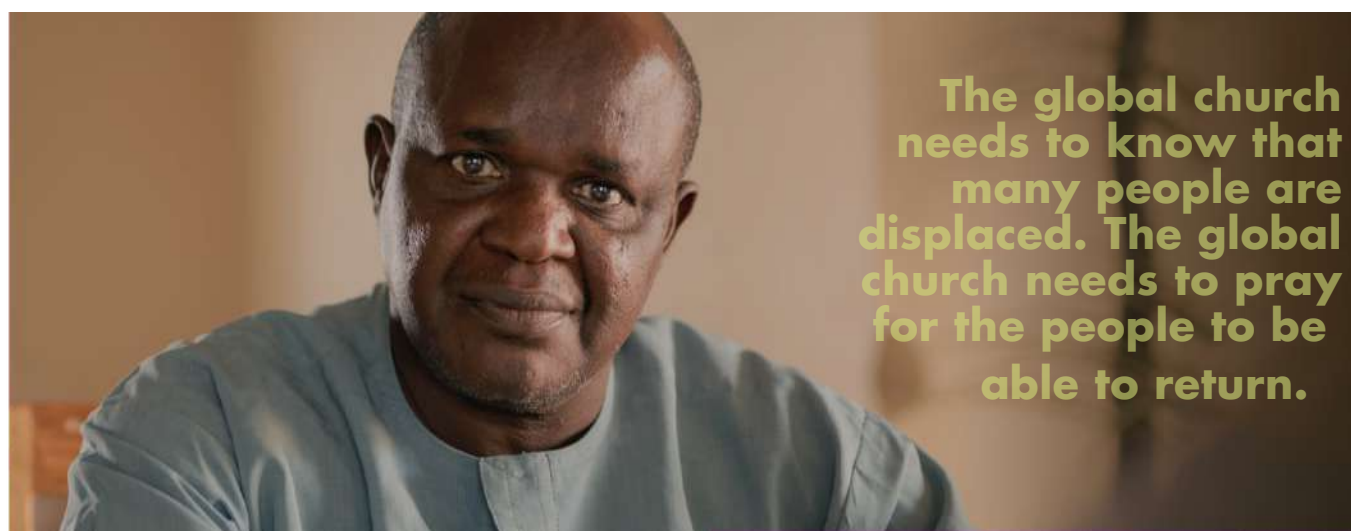
Due to data collection limitations, the years FY 2020 to 2021 included a large number of unknown religious identity cases. In FY 2022 to 2023 Christians

Figure 4: Civilians abducted by religious identity of victim (October 2019 – December 2025)



were killed in significantly higher numbers than Muslims or others. However, for the period October 2023 to December 2025 Christians continued to be killed at high levels, but there was an increase in the numbers of Muslims killed.⁸

Figure 4 shows the breakdown in abductions and a similar trend. While up until FY 2023 the number of Christian victims was higher than that of Muslims, the ratio has shifted and since FY 2024 more Muslims have been abducted than Christians. This reflects a shifting pattern of conflict, most notably an increase in ethno-religious violence perpetrated by militant members of the Fulani people group, with Muslims from the Hausa tribe increasingly vulnerable alongside Christian communities.



Pastor Josiah in a one-to-one trauma care session

⁸ This does not take into account the size of the populations in the states where the killings and abductions took place. The fact that Muslims outnumber Christians means the relative impact on the Christian community is higher.

Perpetrators and geography of the violence

The new patterns in the civilian victims' religious identity and the location of the violence are largely explained by analysing the perpetrators and geography of the violence. Killings and abductions are often associated with Boko Haram and the breakaway group ISWAP, but comparing Figure 5, showing incidents perpetrated by these groups, with Figure 6, showing incidents perpetrated by Fulani militants, illustrates how the extent of killings by Fulani militants is far greater.⁹

This pattern is repeated when comparing the perpetrators of abductions in Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 5: Civilians killed by Boko Haram and ISWAP (October 2019 – September 2025)

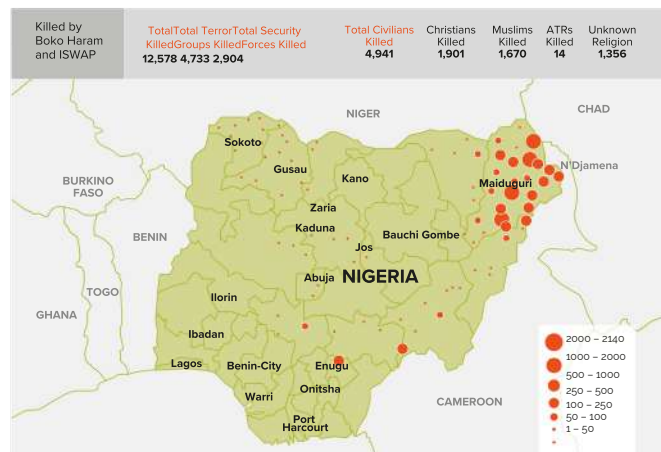


Figure 6: Civilians killed by Fulani militants (October 2019 – September 2025)

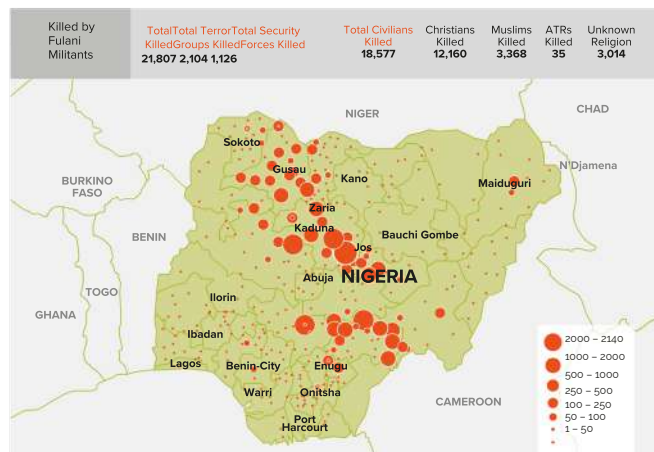
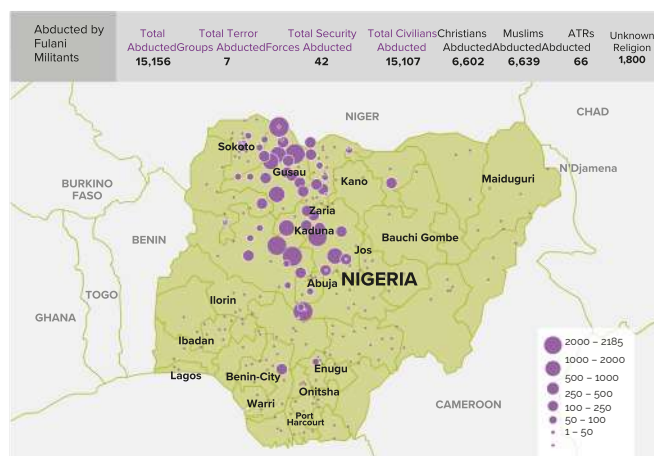


Figure 7: Civilians abducted by Boko Haram and ISWAP (October 2019 – September 2025)



Figure 8: Civilians abducted by Fulani militants (October 2019 – September 2025)



Boko Haram and ISWAP are very active in the North-East, with Fulani militants and a variety of unidentified terror groups operating there, too. They attack communities, resulting in killings, abductions and displacement, while restricting the movement of those who stay and establishing a parallel government¹⁰ collecting taxes/levies, deciding who farms and how to harvest.

The Fulani militants, who began operations in North-Central Nigeria, have also spread to the wider Middle

Belt¹¹ violently attacking and displacing largely farming communities. This region particularly faces an unprecedented convergence of threats.¹²

In the North-West – as suggested by the increasing proportion of Muslims amongst the civilian victims of the violence – militant Fulani (themselves predominantly Muslim) are not just attacking Christians but also Muslims from other ethnic groups such as the Hausa.

⁹ ORFA data attributes each incident of violence to a perpetrator, and Boko Haram, ISWAP and Fulani militant groups are responsible for over half of the incidents.

¹⁰ BusinessDay, [How bandits are building shadow economies, taxing traders and farmers across Nigeria](#), 16 April 2026.

¹¹ The Middle Belt is a socio-cultural classification that refers to the transitional zone between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria. It is not an official administrative classification.

¹² ORFA, [The Illusion of Progress: Mapping Nigeria's Deteriorating Security Landscape](#), 29 May 2025.



Fulani Militant Violence in Taraba state

On 7 February 2026 Fulani militants launched a co-ordinated violent attack against multiple communities in the Takum Local Government Area of Taraba state. Eyewitnesses reported how they heard gunfire and saw the attackers moving rapidly between the different communities with no security forces in sight. Community leaders reported that more than 70 people were killed and at least 35 churches attacked, some burnt down, some completely damaged and in other cases the property within was destroyed. Food barns were also destroyed. One person was abducted though many others were still missing at the time of the report.¹³ This has resulted in the immediate displacement of many families.

The violence can therefore best be described as ethno-religious, intertwined with economic and environmental drivers, including the scarcity of resources brought on by climate change which has driven herding groups, such as the Fulani, further south in search of fertile land for their cattle. This is compounded by Christians owning most of the farming land.

The causes are complex, but the impact of the violence is devastating as the case study of recent violence in the North-Central Taraba state illustrates.

Arrests and prosecutions

No Road Home noted the impunity with which the perpetrators had carried out violent attacks. There are signs that this may be changing as investigations have intensified leading to some arrests and prosecutions. In April 2026, a Federal High Court in Abuja sentenced a terrorist to death and in a separate judgment the judge convicted two Boko Haram terrorists to life imprisonment and three others to jail terms of 20 years or more.¹⁴ Other arrests and prosecutions are ongoing including the arrest of perpetrators of the shooting of unarmed civilians in Angwan Rukuba, Plateau state.¹⁵

Overall, these violence trends include mixed signals. The recent uptick in numbers of killings and abductions is concerning, though these small steps to address the impunity of perpetrators suggest another direction is possible. To understand how Nigeria finds itself at this crossroads, this brief turns to an analysis of some of the underlying causes.

Broader context

This section explores both the national and international context to understand what lies behind the violence trends.

National context: new state priorities and old weaknesses

The Nigerian government has begun taking steps to address the violence, which could shift Nigeria toward a more secure path, though their effectiveness remains uncertain. In November 2025 President Tinubu declared a nationwide security emergency. He ordered additional recruitment into the Nigerian Armed Forces and police, and retrained and redeployed all police officers escorting VIPs to security-challenged areas. A nationwide upgrade in police training facilities was also ordered and steps were taken to strengthen the state police.

The Department of State Security was empowered to deploy guards to tackle bandits in the forests and the government also encouraged an end to open grazing and surrender of illegal weapons held by Fulani herdsman, advising them to take advantage of the newly-created Livestock Ministry¹⁶ as an alternative to raiding farmers.¹⁷

Despite these efforts, other initiatives of the Nigerian government (such as the controversial ‘deradicalisation’, ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘reintegration’ of ‘repentant’ terrorists, including allegedly into the Nigeria military¹⁸) appear to have no clear legal framework as well as no clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure long term effectiveness. There are reports of polarisation in the military and the leaking of intelligence reports to terrorists,¹⁹ undermining the army’s attempts to take action and sometimes leading to attacks on military bases and high-profile murders of senior military officers. The government’s attempt to push back the perpetrators of violence is also potentially undermined by the alleged practice of the Nigerian government itself paying ransoms.²⁰ These weaknesses risk undermining progress and pulling Nigeria back toward a trajectory of continued violence and impunity.

¹³ Persecution.org, [At Least 70 Tiv Christians Feared Killed in Renewed Attacks in Taraba State](#), 7 February 2026.

¹⁴ News Agency of Nigeria, [Court sentences Boko Haram member to death by hanging](#), 9 April 2026.

¹⁵ Open Doors, [Praying for Jos: Palm Sunday attack shakes Nigerian community](#), 31 March 2026.

¹⁶ This was created to develop policies that will promote ranching and enhance animal husbandry practices leading to improved livelihood for farmers and maintenance of social harmony. See [Federal Ministry of Livestock Development](#), Accessed 23 June 2026.

¹⁷ Presidential Villa State House, [President Tinubu declares a security emergency, orders army, police to recruit more personnel](#), 26 November 2025.

¹⁸ In April 2026, the Nigeria military announced that it had graduated over 700 rehabilitated and repentant terrorists ready to be reintegrated back into the society. See Arise News, [Federal Government deradicalises 744 former terrorists](#), Accessed 23 June 2026.

¹⁹ ADF, [Nigeria Grapples With Terrorist Intelligence-Gathering](#), 24 February 2026.

²⁰ BBC News, [Nigeria denies report it paid 'huge' ransom to free pupils in mass abduction](#), 24 February 2026; Vanguard, [Nigeria paid Boko Haram ransom for kidnapped pupils – Sources](#), 26 February 2026.

International context: a world awakening?

In response to growing concern about the levels of violence against Nigerian Christians that emerged in the media and policy debate, US President Donald Trump re-designated Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern on 31 October 2025²¹, threatening the Nigerian government that if left unaddressed, the US would cut off aid and assistance and also intervene militarily to ‘completely wipe out the Islamic Terrorists who are committing these horrible atrocities’.²²

The Nigerian government and its allies refuted the allegation including sending delegations to meet with the US government. However, the US government followed through and launched missile strikes on 26 December 2025 in co-ordination with Nigeria’s government, targeting the military camps of an ISIS linked terrorist group in the far North-West of the country. Another joint operation, on 16 May 2026, killed Abu-Bilal al-Manuki, a top Islamic State leader and former senior commander of Boko Haram.²³

The shift in US policy has evidently caused the Nigerian government to take further steps to increase the security of Christians, however the long-term impact of the military strikes is unclear. It has been suggested that the spike in abductions in schools in November 2025 could have been an attempt to gather human shields for protection in response to the threat of US military intervention²⁴ and that targeting one particular terrorist group might serve to lionise this one rather than deter the terrorists in general.²⁵ There are indications that extremist groups have become more daring: an Islamic cleric made a bold call for the beheading of a pastor for alleged blasphemy, placing a bounty of one million naira.²⁶

The other question many are asking is whether, given other foreign policy concerns, the US and the wider international community will sustain the pressure and partnerships that will bolster the Nigerian government’s response to the violence and related humanitarian needs. The prospect of increased humanitarian support currently seems far off. At the beginning of 2026 the UN resident and humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria related how, “A few years ago, Nigeria’s humanitarian response plan raised close to \$1 billion annually... Last year, barely \$262 million. This year, we are not even certain we will reach \$200 million.”²⁷

The extent of the violence and humanitarian needs in Nigeria require a scaled and sustained response by the Nigerian government in partnership with the international community. This is clearly a crossroads moment. Will the Nigerian government strengthen and sustain steps taken so far to address the violence, and will the international community continue to press for and support a new direction?

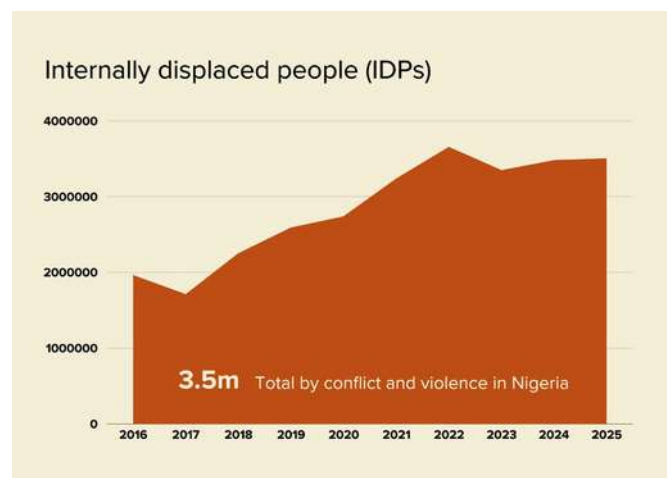
Displacement realities: Is there any road home?

This brief focuses on one major consequence of the violence, which is to drive internal displacement. This is in follow up to the *No Road Home* which highlighted the particular challenges for Christian internally displaced people (IDPs), and if Nigeria is at a crossroads, a particular question is whether a safe ‘road home’ is opening up.

IDP numbers

Recent estimates suggest that internal displacements in Nigeria have remained persistently high despite years of humanitarian and government interventions. The reported total of IDPs in Nigeria as of 1 April 2026 is 3,837,400.²⁸ In addition, as of March 2026, 405,158 Nigerians are displaced as refugees in Niger, Chad and Cameroon.²⁹

Figure 9: Trend in conflict and violence related IDPs in Nigeria, 2016 – 2025³⁰



Recent estimates suggest that internal displacements in Nigeria have remained persistently high despite years of humanitarian and government interventions

²¹ US Department of State, *Countries of Particular Concern, Special Watch List Countries, Entities of Particular Concern*, accessed 23 June 2026. For more detail on what this entails, see United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *Revisiting the CPC Designation*, September 2024.

²² Politico, *Trump threatens to deploy the military 'guns-a-blazing' to Nigeria*, 1 November 2025.

²³ BBC News, *Senior IS leader killed in joint operation, US and Nigeria say*, 16 May 2026.

²⁴ Guardian, *Bandits afraid of possible U.S. airstrikes, abducting children as shields — Gana*, 23 November 2025.

²⁵ Global Initiative Against Transnational Globalized Crime, *Legitimizing Lakurawa. The implications of the US air strikes in Nigeria*, 9 January 2026.

²⁶ PM News, *Nigerian Islamic cleric offers \$1m bounty on Christian cleric, calls for beheading in viral video*, 15 April 2026.

²⁷ UN News, *Violence roiling Nigeria extends beyond religious lines, amid a deepening humanitarian crisis*, 29 January 2026.

²⁸ UNHCR, *Forcibly Displaced Population in Nigeria*, Last updated 1 April 2026. UNHCR sources are the Government of Nigeria, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

²⁹ UNHCR, *Nigerian Refugees and Repatriation Overview*, 1 April 2026.

³⁰ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Displacement Data*, accessed 15 May 2026.



Pastor Josiah in a one-to-one trauma care session

IDP statistics are difficult to collect and are often under-estimates.³¹ However, comparisons over time reveal a trend, shown in Figure 9 on the previous page. Between 2016 and 2025 the overall trajectory has been upward, rising from about 1.7 million in 2017 to between three and four million by the mid-2020s, stabilising over the last few years.

Statistics on returnees (former IDPs who returned to their locality of origin) are region specific and while assessments suggest a small increase in the number of returnees in the North-East³² (which has the highest IDP numbers) and some levels of returnees in the North-West and North-Central³³, these are not contributing to an overall reduction in IDP numbers in the last two years, signaling a protracted displacement situation in which many displaced people still lack access to durable solutions.

Where IDPs are being hosted

Internally displaced people in Nigeria are hosted either in formal camps, more informal settlements or within host communities. The recent needs monitoring conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in North-East Nigeria identified that just under one million of the 2.3 million IDPs in the region are in camps, with the rest split between integration and relocation.³⁴ This means host communities in North-East Nigeria continue to be the most common lifeline for displaced persons, yet the majority of attention is paid to the experience of IDPs in formal camps. Concerns have been expressed about how the depletion of host community resources may be an indicator of the unsustainability of humanitarian support.³⁵

Many host communities which accommodate IDPs do not have increased allocations from government leading to a strain in their resources. The presence of IDPs in host communities tends to overshadow the needs of the host communities which can lead to resentment, hostility and sometimes evacuations.³⁶ As documented in the *No Road Home* report, Christian IDPs in Borno state were subjected to unfair treatment and faith-based discrimination, particularly in terms of access to shelter, humanitarian aid, education and employment.



Yelwata and Daudu attacks³⁷

Joanna and Asabe

Late one night in June 2025 Fulani militant groups stormed the Yelwata and Daudu communities of Guma Local Government Area, Benue state killing IDPs in their hundreds, including five security personnel. This attack happened despite early warning and intelligence shared with security agencies about these impending attacks. The attackers repelled every resistance as they attacked IDPs who were sheltered in market stalls and other places. Several families were burnt to death inside their houses and market stalls, while children were slaughtered.

Simultaneously, a separate group of the Fulani militants descended on Daudu community, overpowering the youths and security agents who resisted the attacks. One eyewitness said that the scale of the violence was beyond their imagination. He also noted that people from Tse Hwar, Ikyogen, and other neighbouring villages have all been displaced, and most of them were staying in some of the stores in the market. According to the eyewitness, “They burnt down six warehouses, an office, and some other stores, all containing people. Human beings were burned to ashes, beyond recognition. My uncle, his wife, two children, and his in-laws are all gone, burnt to ashes.”

³¹ Moreover, a reliable breakdown of IDPs by religious identity does not exist.

³² IOM, *Nigeria — North-east — Mobility Tracking Round 50 IDP and Returnee Atlas (July 2025)*, accessed 15 May 2026.

³³ IOM, *Nigeria — North-Central and North-West — Round 18 IDP Atlas (October 2025)*, accessed 15 May 2026.

³⁴ IOM, *Nigeria — North-east — Mobility Tracking Round 50 IDP and Returnee Atlas (July 2025)*, accessed 15 May 2026.

³⁵ Agunyai, S.C. & Phago, K., *The unsustainability of humanitarian aid in internally displaced (IDP) camps in Nigeria*, African Identities 23(4), November 2024.

³⁶ CRC, *Facts and Figures January – October 2016*, accessed 15 May 2026.

³⁷ Open Doors partner reporting. The prosecution of the suspected perpetrators for the Yelwata attack is reported by Reuters, *Nigeria charges nine with 2025 massacre that killed 150*, 2 February 2026.

Repeated displacement cycles, land occupation and ongoing insecurity

The North-Central states of Plateau, Benue and southern Kaduna have suffered violent attacks and displacement multiple times. In these states, the IDPs commonly settle among friends, family and relatives. With the exception of Benue state, there are rarely official IDP camps leaving people vulnerable as they are targeted for repeated attacks at informal sites.³⁸ Many of the communities in these states have entire villages completely displaced³⁹ and sometimes the perpetrators occupy those places⁴⁰ which makes it impossible to return home or to farm the land.

Many of the IDPs are vulnerable to repeat attacks as this case study on the previous page from Benue state illustrates. These dynamics make return not only difficult but, in many cases, almost impossible, reinforcing the reality that for many IDPs there is still no viable road home.

Levels of humanitarian support

International aid and relief in IDPs camps, which has been a buffer and major lifesaver for survivors of violence and displaced people, is now insufficient, because of reduced funding from international organisations. This exacerbates the already challenging situation in the North-East where Christian IDPs suffer discrimination in aid and relief distribution.⁴¹ Recent needs monitoring conducted by the IOM in North-East Nigeria notes that accessing enough food was the primary concern.⁴² Additionally, the removal of fuel and devaluation of the naira are all combining to increase economic hardship.⁴³

The lack of infrastructure and resultant poor living conditions in the IDP camps (formal and informal) increase the vulnerability of IDPs to exploitation. Some of the already limited funds for IDP support are misappropriated and the products procured by NGOs for IDPs are inadequate.⁴⁴ This can push IDPs to risk returning home to their homes and farms even when they are not safe. In Borno state, pressures from government also force IDPs to return to their land even if it remains under the control of the very groups who displaced them.⁴⁵



Woman's clothing shop

Positive steps to protect and return IDPs

The Nigerian government has recently improved the legal framework for protecting its displaced populations. In March 2026, the President signed into law the Kampala Convention Domestication Act.⁴⁶ This will help safeguard the rights of IDPs and establish expectations for the prevention of internal displacement and protection of IDPs into law.

In Benue state, in order to address the challenge of informal camps and settlements, the government created a mega camp in Makurdi, the state capital, to bring together all IDPs in one location to enable easy access to support and increased protection while attempts at more durable solutions are in progress. In Plateau state, the Eden Project is an NGO and government partnership to resettle an initial one hundred internally displaced families into modern houses, schools and other infrastructure.⁴⁷ The Plateau state government also inaugurated a committee to compile data on the number and location of displaced communities with a view to resettling them. The state authorities have established collaborations with security agencies for the safe resettlement of IDPs and sanitising the land sector to ensure proper land documentation and enforcement of Plateau state Anti-Land Grabbing Law to allow IDPs return to their lands after displacement.⁴⁸

These developments represent early steps that could contribute to a more secure trajectory, opening up the possibility, though not yet the reality, of a sustainable road home.

The lack of infrastructure and resultant poor living conditions in the IDP camps (formal and informal) increase the vulnerability of IDPs to exploitation.

³⁸ Punch, *21,000 displaced Plateau residents live with friends, relatives – Community leader*, 24 January 2025.

³⁹ Foundation for Investigative Journalism, *After the Attacks: Inside Plateau Communities Where Authorities' Failures, Injustice Fuel Future Violence*, 20 May 2026.

⁴⁰ This Day, *Disturbing Occupation of 151 Villages by Armed Herders in Plateau State*, accessed 15 May 2026.

⁴¹ Open Doors, International Institute for Religious Freedom & World Evangelical Alliance, *No Road Home: Christian IDPs displaced by extremist violence in Nigeria*, September 2024.

⁴² IOM, *North-East Nigeria Displacement Report 51*, accessed 15 May 2026.

⁴³ See *No Road Home* and HumAngle, *Resettled IDPs Face New Challenges in North East Nigeria*, 9 October 2024.

⁴⁴ Ajiboye, B.M., *A study of Local Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) as humanitarian Responders in Bakassi internally displaced Persons' camp, Borno State, Nigeria*, World Development Perspectives 38, May 2025.

⁴⁵ ReliefWeb, *Nigeria – Key Message Update: Prolonged conflict and economic strain drive high food assistance needs in the north*, 30 January 2026.

⁴⁶ The full title of the Act is the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (Domestication and Enforcement) Act, 2024.

⁴⁷ Government of Plateau state, *Excitement as Governor Mutwang flags off IDPs resettlement project by Eden Initiative in Bassa LGA*, 18 December 2025.

⁴⁸ Leadership, *Gov Mutwang Vows To Implement Anti-land Grabbing Law*, accessed 24 May 2026.

... the payment of these large ransom sums does not guarantee safe release because captives are sometimes killed after receipt of ransom money.

Pastor Josiahs hands in his interview

Impact and future of the Church Destruction of churches and the displacement of congregations

While there are some positive signs, they are small-scale in relation to the tide of violence that continues to impact the Christian church in Nigeria, including church buildings and activities. The extent of damage to churches is not verifiable due to the absence of a central database collecting this information. One reported estimate is that over 19,100 churches have been destroyed in Nigeria in the last 16 years, which translates into more than three churches destroyed daily.⁴⁹ Whether that is an over-estimate or not, it is clear that churches in the northern part of Nigeria are being heavily impacted, with the rural areas worse hit, heightening displacement and disrupting activities in these churches.

Abductions of church leaders and resultant financial exhaustion

Abductions of clergy, sometimes with their wives or family members, remain high. Payment of ransoms have become the norm despite the law criminalising payment of ransoms.⁵⁰ Ransoms for clergy are significantly higher compared to other citizens given the perception that church leaders have networks, potentially including international connections, that could enable payment.⁵¹ However, the payment of these large ransom sums does not guarantee safe

release because captives are sometimes killed after receipt of ransom money. Ransoms bleed the church's financial resources, and the loss of church leaders weakens the faith of many Christians, particularly the youth.



Cross at a mass grave for 22 Christians killed by extremists in northern Nigeria

⁴⁹ The Catholic World Report, [Christian persecution in Nigeria: 1,200 churches destroyed annually, hundreds killed](#), 26 September 2025.

⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, [Nigeria outlaws ransom payments, kidnap now punishable by death](#), 27 April 2022.

⁵¹ This pattern was identified in the No Road Home report and see also VOA, [Nigerian Church Leader Says Huge Ransom Paid for His Release](#), 1 June 2022.

... The widows, sometimes very young women, find themselves with the responsibility of caring for the children in the absence of their husbands, either because they were killed or had to escape.



Badoo at the clothing shop

Long-term demographic shifts

The persistent violence is redrawing the map of Christianity in Nigeria. The displacement has led to a net loss of Christian presence from many rural and semi-rural areas in the north and North-Central states like Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Benue, Plateau, southern Kaduna and Nasarawa.⁵² Returnees are deterred by ongoing violence and they may return to find the village renamed⁵³ and with land registration largely oral in rural areas it is nearly impossible to prove ownership legally to recover this land.

The flight to urban areas means that the Christian presence has grown in cities such as Maiduguri, Yola, Jos, Makurdi and Abuja. There they establish new church congregations or join existing ones. This has side effects, as it can lead to overcrowded churches, expanded informal settlements and new social tensions between IDPs and host communities, exacerbated by the fact that these are farming families who have lost their livelihoods.⁵⁴

Overall, the Christian map of Nigeria is now marked by:

- **shrinking visibility** in some rural northern and central areas,
- **increased concentration** in towns and cities,
- **growing fragmentation** of once cohesive rural Christian communities.

Christian practices have adapted, with churches moving to smaller or more discreet gatherings in high risk areas, and the daily life of faith being marked by fear, trauma and resilience. Christian survival strategies include flight, mutual aid, trauma healing initiatives and persistent prayer, but also complex engagement with state security forces and non state actors. Other forms of intervention include establishing informal schools with customised curricula. In these models, locals and displaced persons are recruited to serve as volunteer teachers.

⁵² ORFA, *How Fulani Militias Became Nigeria's Deadliest Group While Escaping Global Notice*, 14 July 2025.

⁵³ *The Street Journal*, *Fulani Herdsmen Rename 'Conquered' Communities in Plateau*, 30 June 2018; *Vanguard*, *How herdsmen seized, renamed 102 Plateau communities — Rwang Pam*, 12 December 2021.

⁵⁴ Nigeria Context Analysis Team, *Conflict Dynamics Among Internally Displaced Persons and Host Community in Jere LGA Jul. 2023*, 10 January 2024.

Female-headed households have emerged on a very large scale. The widows, sometimes very young women, find themselves with the responsibility of caring for the children in the absence of their husbands, either because they were killed or had to escape. These women are mostly farmers, but are now displaced from their lands, with no other livelihood skills. Some of the interventions offered therefore include skills acquisition trainings such as sewing clothes (tailoring), hairdressing, the production of soaps, detergents and disinfectants. After training, women and young people receive funds to help them start up a business. The funds are part of micro-credit projects, sometimes given as a loan, or as one-off support.



Joanna and Asabe

Christian survival strategies include flight, mutual aid, trauma healing initiatives and persistent prayer, but also complex engagement with state security forces and non state actors. Other forms of intervention include establishing informal schools with customised curriculae.



Livelihood support programme



Badoo at the clothing shop

Badoo and her family ran throughout the night and eventually found safety in an IDP camp.

“It was a terrible day for us,” Badoo recalls. The camp offered shelter and some security, but little else, no running water nor proper toilet systems and limited food aid. She described how, “Life is difficult in the camps. The camp is surrounded by mosquitoes, and our temporary house was made from bamboo and a mosquito net. That is how we were living and trying to survive with our children”.

Badoo gave birth in the camp. With six children to feed and no income, her family’s future looked uncertain. Through local partners, Open Doors delivered aid and support to IDP camps from 2024. To support families, like that of Badoo on their path to dignity and self-sufficiency, 250 households in the Benue state were offered a livelihood support programme. It was during this programme that Badoo was enrolled in a six-month vocational training covering fashion design, catering and leather work. At the end of the course she was provided with sewing equipment and support to rent a shop for a full year, helping her establish a sustainable business. She described how “I am a different person now, well-kept and looking good with beautiful dresses unlike before. I can sew and earn money”.

Badoo was able to move her family out of the camp and now lives in a small apartment. She was also able to send her children back to school.

Conclusion

Two years after No Road Home, Nigeria remains at a crossroads. The evidence presented in this brief points neither to a clear deterioration nor to a positive turning point, but to a fragile moment in which the direction of travel hangs in the balance.

On one road, current trends continue or worsen. The recent increases in killings and abductions signal a potential escalation of violence, while the persistence of impunity, weak institutional capacity, and underfunded humanitarian response would deepen displacement and suffering. In this scenario millions of Nigerians, Christians and Muslims alike, remain trapped in cycles of insecurity, with little realistic prospect of return. For the Christian church, this would mean the continued erosion of its presence in parts of northern Nigeria, with long-term consequences that may prove difficult to reverse.

On the other road, the tentative positive signals identified in this brief are built upon. Recent arrests and prosecutions, though limited, suggest that impunity is not inevitable. Government reforms, if sustained

and strengthened, could begin to restore security. International attention and pressure, if maintained, could reinforce these efforts and help mobilise the scale of humanitarian and development response required. In this scenario, the conditions could begin to emerge for safe return, recovery of livelihoods, and rebuilding of communities.

At present, the balance between these two futures remains uncertain. The steps taken so far are insufficient on their own to shift the trajectory, but they demonstrate that change is possible.

The decisive factor will be whether these early actions are sustained and scaled by the Nigerian government, supported by the international community, and complemented by the continued resilience and engagement of the Nigerian and global church.

The stakes are high for millions of Nigerians. Without meaningful and co-ordinated action, the trajectory points toward greater instability and prolonged displacement. But with sustained commitment, there remains a credible path toward a more secure future and toward restoring a road home for those who have been forced to flee.

Pastor Josiah walking through the valley in northern Nigeria

RECOMMENDATIONS

PROTECT NIGERIAN CITIZENS FROM ATTACKS

Nigerian citizens need urgent and robust protection from violent militant attacks. We call on:

the **Nigerian government** to increase security and implement a concrete plan to protect citizens from attacks, especially in the northern regions, by:

- fully and effectively implementing the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Act 2024, by
 - ensuring and monitoring the effectiveness of the system to track, collect and destroy illegal weapons;
- doing everything in its power to disarm members of violent militant groups;
- increasing local security presence and working with local communities to establish early warning systems and monitoring their effectiveness.

PROTECT INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE AND ENABLE THEM TO RETURN

Internally Displaced People in Nigeria need protection and assistance to return to their ancestral lands. We call on:

the **Nigerian government**, in collaboration with the **international community**, to implement immediate measures to improve protection of IDPs and ensure their safe return to their lands. This includes by:

- restoring security in the affected areas, deploying adequate security forces to protect returnees and prevent the unlawful occupation of homes and farmlands by perpetrators;
- providing essential support and services to enable returnees to rebuild their lives and livelihoods;
- fully and effectively implementing the Kampala Convention Domestication Act 2026 to strengthen protection, assistance and durable solutions for internally displaced people.

INCREASE HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT

Current programming and funding levels are insufficient to meet the needs caused by the escalating crises in Nigeria. We call on:

the **Nigerian government**, in collaboration with the **international community**, to:

- mobilise adequate and urgent humanitarian response to address the needs of all those affected by the violence – including their long-term practical and psycho-social needs;

the **Nigerian government**, in collaboration with the **international community** and **humanitarian actors** to:

- include local faith leaders and organisations in the decision-making and coordination of the humanitarian response;
- recognise how IDPs' faith can increase their vulnerability;
- promote religious literacy among staff to prevent discriminatory treatment that violates fundamental humanitarian principles and ensure equal treatment regardless of age, gender, religion or belief.

the **Global Church**, the **Nigerian Diaspora Church** and **churches in less affected areas of Nigeria** to:

- stand in prayer and practical solidarity with vulnerable Nigerian Christians and churches by mobilising humanitarian assistance, psychological support and advocacy to promote their protection and restoration.

UPHOLD JUSTICE AND ADDRESS IMPUNITY

Militant groups have committed violence with impunity in Nigeria for many years. We call on:

the **Nigerian government** to:

- build on recent positive steps by carrying out independent, impartial and thorough investigations into attacks, promptly prosecuting perpetrators and holding them accountable to the justice system;
- investigate and hold security forces accountable for failures to respond to attacks and to protect communities;
- establish legal and operational mechanisms that empower state authorities – subject to clear accountability and oversight measures – to respond rapidly and effectively to protect communities facing imminent or ongoing violence.

the **international community** to:

- provide training and technical support to members of the Nigerian police, security forces and judiciary to counter militants and prosecute extremists.

PROMOTE RESTORATION AND RECONCILIATION

Affected Nigerian communities need healing and restoration. We call on:

the **Nigerian government**, in collaboration with the **international community**, to:

- implement a reconciliation process – seeking input and engagement from both faith and community leaders – to address the root causes of the violence and to ensure the protection and restoration of indigenous communities.