



March 10, 2010

PCC RESPONSE TO THE PRESENT CRISIS IN NIGERIA

In the early morning hours of Sunday, March 7, three villages located about ten kilometres south of Jos in Nigeria's Plateau State were attacked by gangs of armed Muslim men. The villages involved are inhabited by Christians of mostly Berom ethnicity. More than 200 Christian villagers were killed with guns and machetes, or by being burned alive in their homes. Many more people are reported missing and survivors are living in fear, afraid to leave their homes, distrustful of the ability of local and national authorities to protect them.

It is believed that these attacks were retaliation for a previous Christian attack on the nearby Muslim town of Kuru Karama that took place on January 19, following an outbreak of sectarian violence in Jos on January 17 that caused the deaths of more than 300 people, both Muslim and Christian.

Nigeria is a country which is deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines. Plateau State lies in the middle belt of Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and mostly Christian south. It is a place where fierce competition for control of fertile farm and grazing lands has resulted in repeated clashes in recent years between indigenous groups and settlers from the north. More than 1000 people were killed in such clashes in 2001, more than 700 in 2004 and more than 300 in 2008. Unfortunately, those perpetuating these attacks have mostly operated within a culture of impunity. Arrests are made at the time that atrocities are committed, but most of those arrested are released when order is restored, and almost no one has been called to face justice for the crimes that have been committed. The result is an ongoing tension between Christians and Muslims which makes it possible for even minor provocations of one group by another to lead to further outbreaks of senseless violence.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada joins the Rt. Rev. Dr. Ubon Basse Usung, Moderator of our partner, The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, in strongly condemning this latest attack on unsuspecting villagers and in calling on the Federal Government of Nigeria to establish a Conflict Resolution Committee made up of leaders of the Christian and Muslim religions, community chiefs, government authorities and members of the security forces to establish a just and enduring peace among the members of the various ethnic and religious communities involved in these attacks.

We also call on state and federal authorities in Nigeria to put an end to the culture of impunity by making every effort to identify and punish to the full extent of the law all those responsible for instigating and for carrying out these murderous attacks. In addition, we call upon state and federal authorities to make a concerted and sustained effort to deal with the underlying causes of these repeated outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence; namely, discrimination between settlers and indigenes, endemic poverty, and the continuing unresolved disputes over land. Finally, we call on all people of faith, everywhere, to pray and to work together for peace, healing, reconciliation, and acceptance of all human rights for the people of Nigeria.

The Rev. Harvey Self,

Moderator, 135th General Assembly,
The Presbyterian Church in Canada