Nigeria

A trama healing workshop for victims of anti-Christian violence

The lives of many Christians in Nigeria are being taken or torn apart by the ruthless campaign of the militant Islamist group Boko Haram. It is mounting attacks on various targets, including the security forces, and it has openly declared its intention of driving Christians from the North of the country, where it wants to establish an Islamic state.

The group is thought to have killed over 3,500 people since the launch of its violent campaign in 2009. The US finally designated Boko Haram and its offshoot Ansaru as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs) in November 2013 after a long campaign by Nigerian Christians, backed by Barnabas Fund.

Boko Haram has not only engaged in its own brutal acts of violence; it has also exploited existing tensions to encourage other Muslims to attack Christians. Anti-Christian atrocities are continuing on almost a daily basis, and they occur not only in the mainly Muslim North, but also in the Middle Belt, where Christians and Muslims are roughly equal in number. Incidents in 2013 have included raids on homes and villages that left dozens dead and scores of houses destroyed, the abduction of Christian girls who were then coerced into renouncing their faith, the bombing and torching of churches, and an attack on Christians at a bus station. Despite its efforts to stop the violence, the government has not succeeded in effectively containing it, or in bringing those responsible to justice.

An Islamist agenda is also being enforced by the authorities in some parts of the North. Twelve states have sharia in at least some Muslim-majority areas, and some of these interpret it strictly. Non-Muslims are subject to certain sharia practices (such as the separation of men and women in public), and some states fund sharia-enforcement groups. Christians in the North may be denied building permits for new church buildings or suffer other forms of discrimination.

Although parts of Nigeria came into contact with Christianity as early as the fifteenth century, the principal phase of mission activity began in the nineteenth century. Both Western and African-American missionaries were involved. In the colonial period the mission agencies established rural networks of education and health care, some of which still exist.

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