

Nigeria UPR 2018

Stakeholder submission from a faith-based coalition¹, coordinated by the World Council of Churches.

In November and December 2017, four workshops were held in Benue, Jos, Ibadan and Enugu with adults and children (girls and boys), including those with disabilities, and from different religious communities, to learn about the Universal Periodic Review and give their own perspectives about human rights in Nigeria.

Constitutional and legislative framework

Participants in Benue welcomed the adoption of an Anti-grazing law in October 2017 by Benue, Taraba, and Adamawa State governments. The law forbids open rearing and grazing of livestock and requires herdsmen to compensate farmers whose crops are destroyed by cattle on their lands. It calls for the establishment of ranches and livestock administration, regulation and control to cater for the herds. Whilst participants in the November workshops expressed their hopes that the enactment of the anti-grazing law would improve the situation, it was clear by January 2018 that it had failed to reduce tensions between farming and herding communities, and a sharp rise in violent attacks had occurred.

Participants considered that the Government had failed to respect and enforce the Child Rights Act of 2003 because not all States had yet domesticated this Act.

Participants commended the Nigerian Senate for the passing of the “Not too young to run” bill on July 26 2017. The bill seeks to reduce the age requirement for elective offices in the country, and once it takes effect, Nigerians will be able to stand for President from the age of 35, and Governor or Senator from the age of 30, reducing the previous requirements of 40 and 35 years respectively. 25 year olds can now legislate in the National and State Assemblies across the country. The bill now needs the endorsement of 24 State Assemblies and presidential assent, which had not yet happened at the time of writing (March 2018)

The World Council of Churches and coalition partners welcome the signing by Nigeria of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 20 September 2017. The Treaty has clear references to and implications for human rights law and practice. Preambular paragraph 8 reaffirms “the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law” Nuclear weapons – whether in the context of armed hostilities or nuclear weapons testing programmes – constitute a grave threat to the rights to life, to family, home and property, and to all economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development (insofar as the vast resources expended on developing and maintaining nuclear weapons arsenals constitute an enormous misallocation of resources better used for development and human security).

Recommendations:

There is a need for the establishment of a strong human rights structure from the community to the national level to monitor the implementation of national and international human rights commitments.

Measures must to be taken throughout Nigeria to domesticate, respect and enforce the Child Rights Act of 2003.

The “Not too young to run” bill should receive the necessary endorsements to come into legal effect as soon as possible.

¹ The coalition included the World Council of Churches, the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), the CCN Institute of Church and Society Ibadan, the CCN Institute of Church and Society Jos, Methodist Church Nigeria, Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, Divine Foundation for Disabled Persons, and the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

The Government of Nigeria must ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as a matter of international urgency.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Both male and female workshop participants in all locations were in agreement as to the unacceptable level of discrimination against women and girls in Nigeria, and consider that the Government has failed to address traditional practices which hamper equality between men and women.

Discrimination starts even before the girl child is born. Some women reported that the level of sexual harassment was so high that they were afraid to give birth to a girl. Once girls reach school age, education of boys in the family is prioritised over that of girls. The right to inherit property is denied to the female child, with cultural norms dictating that she will marry and should then have access to her husband's property. In reality, the husband exercises complete control over family property, including his wife's earnings. Girls have no right to express themselves - some reported the denial of their right to demonstrate their talents and skills.

Women reported suffering high levels of inequality in many aspects of their lives, including their lack of political participation and equality in decision making. The ratio of women to men in the government does not encourage women to seek positions of leadership, and women cannot give their opinion without victimisation.

When situations of domestic violence occur, these are considered entirely a family matter with no possibility for outside intervention as the culture of maintaining a good image in society is paramount. It is normally the woman who is forced to leave the home, with little - if any - protection available to her.

The culture of harmful traditions inflicted upon widows includes lack of assistance, and rituals such as being told to drink the water used to wash the dead husbands' body, or be forced to marry a brother of the dead husband. Widows do not have the same rights to inheritance as men, and often lose their land to their late husband's family.

Women participants reported that many aspects of discrimination against women are exacerbated and maintained by women themselves.

Recommendations:

There is an urgent need to address traditional practices and ways of thinking which maintain discrimination against women, through sensitisation and awareness-raising campaigns, seminars and workshops aimed at all levels of society.

Women must be included in decision making at local and national levels, in traditional councils and family courts, so that their voices are heard. Women's empowerment must be supported by those closest to them, particularly their own relatives.

Victims of discriminatory practices must be empowered to speak out and help others receive justice and transformation.

Right to life, liberty and security of person

In Benue, the right to life has been seriously violated by the on-going conflict with Fulani herdsmen. Participants reported that although some efforts had been made to improve security, they remained at risk of violence, including rape and death from attacks when the armed Fulani graze their cattle over their farms. Women and children have been particularly affected. Children in the workshop referred particularly to the massive killings of children in the Agatu Area by Fulani herdsmen between 2014 and 2017.

Recommendations:

Participants called for the deployment of adequate security by the Government in Benue and a lasting resolution to the conflict.

Sexual violence and abuse

Participants reported that there are high rates of rape, sexual violence and sexual abuse suffered in their communities, particularly perpetrated by relatives, family friends and domestic employees working in the victim's home. Whilst the majority of attacks are perpetrated against girls, boys are also victims. People with disabilities are most at risk, and participants pointed to a link between illiteracy and abuse. This type of violence is exacerbated by the low awareness amongst children and young people about the risks, and attitudes of indifference amongst peers.

Girls reported that they feel too ashamed to report abuse, and do not know to whom to turn for help. Those who speak out are routinely disbelieved or even blamed for encouraging the abuse. In situations where parents or guardians have believed the victim and have initiated proceedings, the perpetrator or his family will often pay a bribe to the police or judiciary to ensure that the case is not investigated. Participants reported that there are no social care facilities where victims can go for help and shelter. Victims are forced to continue their lives in the same environments with their abusers and to act as if nothing has happened. The culture of silence allows for the continuation of sexual violence.

Participants felt that certain cultural practices, norms and values contribute to gender inequality, including the tradition of calling older men "uncle."

The Government of Nigeria is to be commended for being the first country in west Africa to launch a national survey on violence against children and becoming a Pathfinder country in the Global Partnership to end Violence against Children.

Recommendations:

Laws must be adopted and implemented to protect women and children from sexual violence and abuse, and to deter and punish violators.

Police and judiciary need adequate training to deal with allegations of sexual violence and abuse in a victim-centred manner.

Victims need to have knowledge of and access to help and medical care. Churches and religious communities must become places of safety and refuge for victims.

Measures should be taken in schools and in communities to raise awareness about sexual violence, abuse, and harassment, and to address the stigma and shame attached to such violence. Children must be taught how to protect themselves and be able to talk about these issues between themselves and with their parents. "If you see something, say something and do something."

Child labour and trafficking

Child labour is a serious concern, particularly impacting children deprived of parental care. Even from a young age, children who are no longer with their parents are at particular risk of being forced into slavery and hard labour in homes and farms, and into prostitution. Children are forced to sell items in the streets, often in high temperatures, and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, involvement in criminal and cult gangs, and drug abuse. Such children are systematically denied their right to education.

Girls particularly risk being trafficked to other parts of the country to work as house helps. Sometimes agents come from large cities, deceiving parents as to their real intentions, and take children with them to exploit them to make money for themselves or to traffick abroad. Refugee children are at greater risk. Kidnappings for these purposes are common.

Recommendations

The practice of sending children out to the streets alone to sell items should be addressed, and children themselves should be taught about their rights.

The trafficking and illegal movement of children to other states and abroad must be addressed.

Violence

Children reported facing a lack of protection from violence and abuse, particularly from parents and caregivers. Punishments which include beatings at home and at school amount to inhuman treatment and must be eliminated. Children felt that their parents do not create enough time to interact with them.

Recommendations:

Violence against children in the home should be addressed through providing parents with skills for positive parenting, and punishments for the maltreatment of children.

Harmful practices

Harmful traditional practices which violate the rights to life, liberty and security of person include female genital mutilation, early marriage and accusations of witchcraft.

Girls aged between 13 and 17 and boys between 15 and 17 are at risk of being forced into marriage by parents or guardians, either because of pregnancy or because the parents are seeking financial gain. Children reported allegations of others – particularly those with disabilities and those from poor families - being accused of witchcraft, of bringing curses on their families, and facing the subsequent risk of being thrown out of the family home.

Children reported being under pressure to join secret societies or gangs which have the intention of harming others.

Recommendations:

Laws to protect children against early marriage should be enforced, with Government Ministries established to oversee this. Campaigns put in place to educate parents and children about the consequences of early marriage.

Laws must be put in place to prevent child abuse and accusations of witchcraft.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Freedom to choose, change or leave a religion or belief

The right to choose, change and leave a religion or belief is protected under the Constitution of Nigeria 1999², however restrictions or violations on this right were widely reported by all workshop participants. Conversion

² Article 38: Freedom of Religion

from one religion to another is not always possible and there is no freedom to choose the type of religion one wants.

Forced conversions and imposing of religion by coercion happens within different religions, and was reported by participants in all locations.

Recommendation:

The right to choose, change or leave a religion or belief without discrimination must be protected. Forced conversions and impingements on this right must be addressed.

Parents and children, and the rights of the child.

Parental preference over child's choice of religion is dominant, and most children practice the religion of their parents. Marriage can sometimes lead to a change of religion which might be accepted by parents, but free choice of religion is usually discouraged by families.

Children – even having reached adulthood - risk rejection by their families, denunciation of family ties and being disinherited for practicing a religion different from that of their parents.

Children and youth participants, who experienced violations or pressure from their own parents or communities, declared that their right to choose or change a religion or belief should be protected. Most adult participants shared the same concern of the right of the child to choose.

Recommendation:

The right of all individuals to choose, change or leave a religion or belief must be protected.

Inter-religious marriage

Most workshop participants said many parents infringe on the rights of their children (child or adult by age) on the right to marry freely. Inter-religious marriage is not always tolerated and causes tension, sometimes leading to violence and even killings.

Recommendation:

Inter-religious and inter-denominational marriage should be allowed without any social punishments or sanctions.

Freedom to manifest a religion or belief

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1. *Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.*
 2. *No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or religion not approved by his parent or guardian.*
 3. *No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.*
 4. *Nothing in this section shall entitle any person to form, take part in the activity or be a member of a secret society.*

Several workshop participants in all locations reported cases of the government refusing to give allocations to religious groups, making it difficult to buy land to build places of worship and thus hindering freedom of worship.

Recommendations:

Laws must be enforced to allow everyone to practice religion freely with access to adequate places of worship and security provided in the worship places.

The government should give religious groups unblocked allocations of land to build places of worship regardless of area or town.

Politicization of religion

The politicization of faith is a major threat to the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of worship. Barriers to the exercise of this freedom are social and political rather than legal, connected to the competition for resources and power. However, there are situations where the government has failed to enforce the Constitution, allowing concerns such as a growth in hate speech being accepted as a religious practice especially in parts of northern Nigeria where Christian (minority) girls are at risk of abduction.

This politicization of faith in Nigeria threatens the security of the country, and the insurgency of Jamaatu Ahli Sunnah Lid' daawati Wal Jihad (Boko Haram) can be traced to a quest for political power and efforts to make a particular religion supreme in a supposedly secular nation.

Recommendations:

The government must uphold the principle of secularism in the Constitution, protect all religious and belief groups equally, and address violations of freedom of religion or belief and violence.

Discrimination by the government at federal, state and local levels between citizens of different religions in terms of their access to resources, political appointments and education must be addressed.

Coercion in the name of religion

Coercion in the name of religion was reported in cases where members of a religious community are expected to operate in a particular way, or to state beliefs which they do not hold, as a result of certain methods of preaching. Many participants reported forced conversions, often achieved by forced marriage or kidnapping. There are accounts of unwelcome religious practices being forced on people, and of coercion and interference of one religious group by another - sometimes lured by benefits to convert. This has been particularly problematic in mission schools, where students are often expected to observe the religious life of the founding mission.

Recommendation:

All members of religions should enjoy freedom of speech, thought and conscience without coercion and forced models of behavior.

Extremism, violence and conflict

Most workshop participants in all locations reported on religion being used to justify extremism, violence and killings. Violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims have occurred, with threats and killings carried out by both sides. The government has failed to address reports of attacks, resulting in a culture of silence.

Poverty is an important factor because young, uneducated men are sometimes encouraged to commit violence in communities in return for payment from extremists and other sponsors who finance such violations for their own, or political, benefit.

Recommendations:

The culture of impunity concerning violence and killings must be addressed, and perpetrators brought to justice.

Adequate security should be provided for worship places.

The government should examine ways to address and arbitrate religious conflict on all levels of society, including through roundtable discussions and interfaith dialogue.

Regional forums of religious leaders and non-discriminatory grassroots level interfaith dialogue groups should be established with regular meetings and activities aimed at peaceful co-existence, tolerance and interaction, to address misunderstandings, promote learning from each other, and advance mutual respect and harmony. Religious leaders should aim to become agents of peace in their preaching and practice.

Platforms should be created where children of different religious beliefs can interact to create religious tolerance, mutual understanding and learn from the other.

Hate speech, manipulation, misunderstanding and lack of knowledge

Workshop participants pointed to the urgent need to address bullying, hate speech and manipulation. Many reported they had observed incitements to hatred preached at some churches and mosques, worsening intolerant attitudes.

Some participants noted that the Government was making plans to adopt a new law on “hate speech”, but this should be treated with caution as it would have the effect of treating hate speech as terrorism with the potential to interfere with the constitutional rights of the people to freedom of expression. It is considered that adequate laws to address hate speech do already exist, but these are not implemented in an adequate and impartial manner.

Recommendations:

Existing laws which address hate speech and hate-inciting teaching and preaching should be enforced and implemented impartially. Hate speech should not be treated as a terror offence.

Education against hate speech in schools is necessary to prevent discrimination and violence against people on the basis of their religion, sexual orientation or disability.

Religious leaders should be given compulsory training in the universal principles of freedom of religion or belief and peaceful co-existence. Teaching should be harmonious and seek to build peace in the society.

Intolerance

Most workshop participants of all age groups reported that religious intolerance is common, both between religions and within religions (including between church denominations). Most participants reported witnessing struggles about the superiority of one religion over another, an unwillingness to listen to the other, and disagreement between people about beliefs. Intolerance, lack of cordial relationships, competition between religions, fear of the unknown, discrimination, hypocrisy, separation, interference of religious groups from other countries, violence and killings were reported.

Recommendations:

The government should promote tolerance, peaceful coexistence and knowledge of other religions, by advocating for overall religious literacy, freedom of religion or belief literacy, and everyday peacebuilding skills.

A national awareness raising campaign on these issues, including through the school curricula, should be established and carried out during the next four years prior to the next UPR of Nigeria.

Education about religious freedom should be continuous and available to all children, women, men, clerics and law enforcement agents. Education should cover peacebuilding, religious tolerance, peaceful content of religions, non-discrimination, the value of everyone's life, and forgiveness.

Regional Issues

Plateau State

Freedom of movement

Workshop participants reported that the right to freedom of movement is restricted on religious days. Roads are blocked for hours during worship, trapping people there and hindering their daily lives, especially during Fridays and Sundays. During hours of praying, it is generally forbidden to pass through areas of worship.

Recommendation:

Freedom of movement should be protected on all days – with security if necessary - especially movement around places of worship.

Freedom to choose a place to live, private property rights

“When we were younger, we used to have Muslim neighbours. It is sadly not the case anymore.” (workshop participant)

Participants in Jos reported that there are many areas in which Muslims and Christians feel unsafe due to religious intolerance. They cannot freely buy land or live where they want. Before the crisis in September 2001 when tensions between Fulani herders and farmers led to the Jos riots in Plateau State with over 1,000 deaths in a week, Christians and Muslims lived in peace as neighbours but are now segregated into areas with others of the same religion. Demarcation of areas hinders movement, rendering it difficult for those of different religions to mix without fear.

Recommendations:

Any action which hinders access to places of worship or restricts the allocation of land for worship buildings must be addressed. The government must ensure the freedom of citizens to choose the location in which they will live.

Segregation of people of different faiths must be discouraged, and inter-religious living encouraged.

Benue State

Religious Education

Participants reported on the discriminatory nature of religious education in Benue State. Islam and Arabic are prioritised in the educational curriculum, and many felt that there are attempts to eradicate Christian religious studies from the educational system. The Nigeria Education Research Council - responsible for the school curriculum - proposed a merger of Christian religious knowledge with CIVIC Education, and compulsory Arabic language studies. This development was rejected by the Christian community and has been withdrawn.

Recommendations:

Equality of teaching about all faith practices in educational curricula must be ensured. School curriculum should recognize all religions and teach religious tolerance.

Policies which offend religious codes of dressing in public schools or the right of children to pray according to their religious belief should be removed.

Conflicts with adherents of Traditional African Religion (TAR) and Christianity

An estimated 10% of Nigerians follow TAR. Several sources of conflict between TAR and Christianity in Benue State were highlighted – particularly when family members belong to the different religions, or a person's religion is unclear.

Participants in Benue raised problems with burial customs, where relatives disagree over whether to bury the deceased by the custom of TAR or Christianity. This was common when a person had converted to Christianity, but relatives refused to allow a Christian burial or tried to interfere with the burial. This has caused the closing down of some churches in the area. Christians have been threatened by members of TAR. TAR prohibits women and girls receiving an inheritance and visiting relatives' graves.

Other conflicts arise from questions of marriage such as the number of wives one can have, or where a Christian convert seeks a church wedding, contrary to the will of relatives. Some problems revolve around annual festivals such as those concerning chieftancy or namings.

Participants in Enugu raised concerns about the ritual of the Masquerade – considered a sacred element of TAR – as an event which can lead to discrimination and violence. When traditional worshippers take part in the display night of the Masquerade, they harass people on the road and damage vehicles. The worshippers force everyone to put off their lights as they pass and any refusal to comply is met with violence and destruction of property.

Recommendation:

Confrontation between members of TAR and Christians should be taken seriously by the state and national governments, and solved by mediation with religious leaders and non-discriminatory local best practices.

Freedom of expression and information

Children reported having their rights denied by parents and by the broader community. They are forbidden to express themselves in public, even in matters which concern them, as adults consider their own opinions to be superior, particularly Elders. They have limited access to information about what is happening in society and in their own environment. Even when they understand that their rights are being violated, they are not given a chance to defend their rights or have a fair hearing. They considered that the denial of this right prevents them from making useful contributions to the development of their community. Children reported being denied the right to choose a career and the right to express their emotions.

Children reported that they are denied the right to associate with their peers, because their parents believe that they are protecting them from inappropriate company.

Right to work

High levels of unemployment were reported in Benue, even for those who are educated. Workers can be fired arbitrarily without any benefits. The non-payment of salaries – often for many months – was a repeated concern. In Benue, teachers had not been paid since early 2017, which in turn led to poverty, strikes, children having no access to education and being forced into labour even as young as five. Women face excessive poverty and even death due to unemployment and non-payment of salaries.

Participants commended the government for providing wheel barrows and fertilisers for agricultural purposes, and mechanical equipment and sewing machines to improve employment. However, participants in Enugu reported that farmers do not receive the assistance of loans or fertilizer from the Government because such support is diverted by people who use it for their personal use, or deliver it too late to be useful.

Recommendations:

Job opportunities and entrepreneurship schemes should be created to reduce unemployment

Government should establish micro-finance schemes that can be accessible to the small scale business men and women and farmers.

Right to Social security and adequate standard of living

Despite Benue being described as the “bread basket” of Nigeria, participants reported suffering a lack of a balanced diet due to the high cost of food. Children reported being fed only with carbohydrates, which has a detrimental effect on their health and development. Participants in both Benue and Jos commended the government for the provision of a school feeding programme for primary school pupils.

The lack of adequate access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities leads to illness and deaths, particularly among children. In Enugu, people reported having to drink from streams and rivers. The supply of electricity is inadequate and there are constant power outages.

The roads are in a very poor condition, and are described as “death traps”.

Recommendations:

The Government should ensure access to sufficient and nutritious food through a “feed the poor” campaign.

There is a need for the creation of boreholes and adequate sanitation in every area where there is no city water. Waste water should be recycled.

The Government must provide adequate sources of electricity to all citizens, and consider alternative sources such as solar energy.

Investment in the condition of the roads must be prioritised to reduce accidents and improve transport.

Poverty and access to social protection

Many children live below the poverty level, with inadequate clothing, food, shelter, education or access to health care, suffer low self-esteem, and are compelled to fend for themselves, leading to criminality. Both the high rates of poverty in Benue as well as the widespread human rights violations across Nigeria were blamed on a lack of good governance, unemployment, non-payment of salaries, and high costs of living. The culture of encouraging large families leads to difficulties for parents to provide for their children. No welfare is available for the elderly, and pensioners are not paid their entitlements. The situation in rural areas is particularly grave.

Recommendations:

The issue of non-payment of salaries and pensions must be addressed as a critical concern to ensure that basic social needs are met. The government must provide special assistance to those families who cannot provide food, shelter, and clothing for their children.

The large differences between salary structures across different states should be examined and made more equitable.

Right to Health

Public hospitals and adequate health facilities are lacking in many parts of Nigeria, which leads to preventable deaths, particularly with respect to maternal and newborn care. Health care is not free, and people lack funds to treat serious illnesses such as diabetes and cancer. Hospital staff are not paid on time, leading to strikes and low levels of motivation.

Concerns were expressed about children being given drugs by older children and adults, leading to addiction and mental disorders.

Participants commended the Government for providing free immunisation of children against Polio and for ensuring effective awareness on communicable and infectious diseases such as Polio, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Ebola and Monkey Pox.

Recommendations

Primary health care must be adequate, affordable and available. Health centres must be fully equipped with qualified medical personnel who are paid on time.

Rehabilitation centres for drug users should be established.

Right to Education

Participants in Benue reported a lack of adequate public schools with good quality teachers, equipment and facilities. A particular need for science laboratories was mentioned. One student mentioned that the school does not even have proper seats. Private schools – with quality teachers – are available, but these are very expensive.

Education is not free and parents cannot afford to cover fees or buy educational materials. Many children drop out of school, particularly girls, as the education of boys is given preference. Corruption affects all aspects of the education system. Teachers often strike or are unmotivated due to lack of payment, so the syllabus is not

covered, delaying many possible graduates. Some teachers only go to school on pay day. Examination malpractice, where teachers accept a bribe and then give better grades, is widespread. Illiteracy is a common concern.

Recommendations:

Quality, accessible and free education up to secondary level should be given sufficient budgetary allocation and ensured for all children, and adult literacy programmes made available.

Teenage mothers must be assisted and encouraged to re-enter the educational system to finish their education.

Teachers should be qualified, properly screened and paid.

Adequate equipment and learning facilities must be provided.

Human rights – particularly child rights - should be part of the school curriculum.

The Government should ensure that the public are enlightened about the importance of education.

The Government should provide a platform where everyone can express their talents and gifts, not just those who can go to university.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Children and adults with disabilities face discrimination on many levels, including from their own parents and relatives. They do not have access to any special education or social welfare. Institutions such as schools, hospitals, churches, airports, government offices are not disability-friendly. It is rare to have access to sign language interpreters or materials in braille in Nigerian public institutions, or physical access for people with reduced mobility.

Children with disabilities reported being made to feel less important and useless, and sometimes separated from their parents against their will, locked up in homes, and subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment.

Poverty and access to social protection

Millions of Nigerians with disabilities live far below the poverty level. Both children and adults living with disabilities are deprived of basic needs like adequate clothing, food and shelter, education and access to health care. They have no options other than street begging, leading to low self-esteem, sexual abuse, drug abuse, killing for ritual purposes and criminality. The high rates of poverty they suffer and many violations of their human rights across Nigeria were blamed on a lack of commitment by the government to their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Recommendations

Government should establish a body to provide oversight for the care of physically or mentally disabled persons, and support parents to care for such children themselves.

Accessible learning facilities must be put in place to ensure that children with disabilities get fully involved in academic and practical activities.

Disabled persons should not suffer discrimination. National laws should be adopted to ensure protection of females and males with disabilities from torture, sexual abuse and other forms of degradation.

Internally displaced people

Years of insurgency and counterinsurgency operations have resulted in the displacement of approximately 1.9 million people in Nigeria's northeast, particularly Borno state. In more recent years, Fulani herdsmen have moved south away from their traditional grazing lands leading to clashes with farmers over the available land. Farmers in Plateau, Benue, and Kaduna States have been particularly affected and displaced as a result of conflict.

Several hundred IDPs have been living in Riyom, close to Jos, for over four years since over 60 villages were attacked and the inhabitants chased away from their lands by armed herdsmen who now graze their cattle in the area. The IDPs reported that the Government has failed to address the violence and that they cannot return to their villages. They do not trust the military to protect them, so they have armed themselves. They reported that the weapons used in the conflict with the Fulani, as well as in gang and other violence, enter Nigeria through the porous borders with Niger and Chad, and some weapons have been traced to Turkey. The ready accessibility of arms on the black market has added to levels of violence.

The IDPs have no adequate accommodation, no farmland or access to food, or means of earning a living. They cannot send their children to school, have no access to health care, no clean water and if they drink the water available, they become ill. They have nothing to do all day, and expressed concern particularly for their children and adolescents who suffer high levels of violence, and are at risk of being trafficked for labour and prostitution. One 15 year old expressed her wish to return to school – she had not been for five years – and then to be able to work to support her family.

The IDPs rely entirely on food deliveries from local churches and sometimes from the ICRC, but nothing is provided to them by the Government. They have received no compensation for the homes they lost. They stated that if the President spoke out, he could resolve the Fulani issue. They regretted that the international community knows very little about this conflict.

Recommendations:

The plea of the IDPs consulted for this report was that the government would tackle the injustice they had suffered, and ensure safe passage for their return to their villages and homes.

Measures must be taken to address the psychological trauma which is being experienced by those who have suffered violence and displacement.