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Nigeria: UN experts warn of rights violations against women and girls from Christian and other religious minority communities

GENEVA - Credible reports of killings, abductions, sexual violence, forced conversion, forced marriage, abductions and acts tantamount to enforced disappearances targeting Christian and other religious minority communities in Nigeria, particularly women and girls, are alarming, UN experts* said today.

“These reports are deeply troubling,” the experts said. “The deteriorating security situation in northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt has created an environment in which armed extremist groups, including Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province, and radicalised individual herdsmen involved in the ‘farmer-herder’ conflict continue to operate with devastating consequences for civilians, amid persistent reports of impunity, institutional failures, and inadequate protection by authorities.”

“The testimonies we have received paint a horrifying picture of fear, trauma, coercion and abandonment,” the experts said. “Victims and survivors must not be left without protection, justice, reparations, including rehabilitation and meaningful support.”

“Violence targeting Christians and other religious minorities continues to be rampant,” the experts said, pointing to the application of local interpretations of Sharia law in the 12 States of Northern Nigeria, the enforcement of blasphemy codes and the long-standing absence of effective access to justice.

"We are particularly alarmed at the very specific and heightened risks of discrimination, violence and exploitation that Christian women and girls are exposed to, as we continue to document grave cases of sexual violence, abductions, acts tantamount to enforced disappearances, forced conversion and child marriage amongst them," the experts said. "In many cases, those who resist are reportedly threatened, punished, disappeared or killed," they added.

In a communication to the Nigerian Government, the experts highlighted multiple incidents, including the abduction and sexual assault of Christian women; the disappearance of girls abducted from a church in Borno State; the forced conversion and child marriage of a 13-year-old girl in Bauchi State; and a brutal attack against a 16-year-old Christian girl whose hand was reportedly cut off after her family rejected a forced marriage proposal by militants.

"These crimes took place within a broader pattern of violence and persecution disproportionately affecting Christian communities in some northern states, including killings, attacks on churches and villages, mass displacement, mob violence linked to accusations of blasphemy, and severe insecurity affecting women and children in internally displaced persons camps," the experts said.

Displaced Christian and other minority women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, including coercion into sexual acts in exchange for food or basic necessities. Some reportedly conceal their religious identity or wear hijabs as a survival strategy to avoid violence or gain acceptance in areas under the control of armed or religious groups, the experts noted.

"If confirmed, these allegations may amount to serious violations of international human rights law, including violations of the rights to life, safety, liberty, security, freedom of religion or belief, freedom from torture, enforced disappearance, slavery and trafficking, and the rights of women and children," they said.

The experts urged Nigerian authorities to take immediate measures to protect those at risk, secure the release and recovery of abducted girls and women, ensure independent impartial and thorough investigations, prosecute perpetrators, and guarantee effective remedies and support for victims and survivors.

"Impunity for these crimes only fuels further violence," they said. "Nigerian authorities must act urgently to prevent further irreparable harm and ensure accountability for all violations."

***The experts:**

- Reem Alsalem, [Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#)
 - Morris Tidball-Binz, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#);
 - Nicolas Levrat, [Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#);
 - Alice Jill Edwards, [Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#);
 - Gabriella Citroni (Chair-Rapporteur), Grażyna Baranowska (Vice-Chair), Aua Baldé, Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez and Mohamed Al Obaidi, [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#).
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