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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Nigeria

Nigeria opened 2010 with uncertainty, following the hospitalization outside the country of President Umaru Yar'Adua. In February the National Assembly named Vice President Goodluck Jonathan acting president. In May Yar'Adua, a northerner, died, leaving Jonathan, from the oil-rich Niger Delta in the south of the country, to finish the final year of his term. The dominant People's Democratic Party (PDP) named Jonathan as its candidate for April 2011 elections, in spite of an informal arrangement whereby northerners and southerners alternate every two terms in the Presidency.

The Middle Belt dividing the largely Muslim north and the largely Christian south has long been an area of tensions, in part due to a system whereby people are classified as 'indigenes' or 'non-indigenes' depending on where their parents or grandparents were born. 'Non-indigenes', in this region, generally Muslims from the Hausa group, are barred from competing for government jobs or academic scholarships, leading to resentment against 'indigenes', most often Berom Christians. While ostensibly intended to protect traditional cultures, the policy has served to divide communities, fuel identity-based politics and deepen existing disputes, for example over land.

These tensions reignited in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, on 17 January, between rival mobs reportedly armed with guns, bows and arrows, and machetes. At least 200 people were killed, with another 5,000 estimated to have been forced from their homes.

Violence spread to the town of Kuru Karama, 30 km away, where at least 150 Muslim residents were reportedly massacred by marauding gangs believed to be Christian. Some of the victims reportedly sought refuge in the local mosque. On 7 March, in what were said by police to be revenge attacks, several hundred Christians were reportedly massacred in the villages of Dogo Nahawa, Zot and Ratsat, 10 km from Jos. In this case the attackers were said to have been Muslim.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called for:

'... a concerted effort to tackle the underlying causes of the repeated outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence which Nigeria has witnessed in recent years, namely discrimination, poverty and disputes over land.'

At year's end, however, violence flared again. Christmas Eve bombs in Jos reportedly killed at least 80 people, sparking more inter-communal violence. Around ten people were said to have been killed in a series of attacks in Maiduguri. The Islamic sect Boko

Haram claimed responsibility; police arrested 90 suspects and were accused of excessive use of force and other violations in the process.

Armed groups based in the Niger Delta have long demanded more even distribution of government income from oil production, which over the last decades has caused environmental damage that has wiped out traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing. An August 2009 amnesty brought a pause in their activities. However, in October the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for two car bombs in Abuja during celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Nigerian independence, though some members disputed its involvement. At least ten people were killed. By year's end sabotage of pipelines and kidnappings of workers had resumed. The Nigerian army said that six civilians were killed in mid-December when it attacked a suspected militant base near the Niger Delta community of Ayakoromo; local groups said the number was higher.

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