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Mass graves of the victims in Tudun Biri © Amnesty Nigeria

December 7, 2023

Nigeria: Military attempting to cover up mass killing of civilians

The Nigerian authorities must promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate the killing of more than 120 civilians in two military air strikes on Sunday, instead of engaging in attempts to cover up the crime, said Amnesty International Nigeria.

At around 10pm on 3 December, the Nigerian military launched an air strike on a religious gathering at Tudun Biri – a village near Kaduna northern Nigeria. A second air strike was

launched around 30 minutes later, killing dozens, including those who rushed to the scene to rescue victims of the initial strike.

The Nigerian military has since put out two contradictory explanations. An initial statement by the Nigerian army in Kaduna said the air strike was a mistake. This was followed by a statement from Nigeria's Defence Headquarters claiming that suspected bandits had embedded with civilians.

The victims were buried in two mass graves on 4 December 2023.

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The Nigerian military's recklessness is a result of the authorities' consistent failure to hold them to account for a long list of such atrocities

Isa Sanusi Director Amnesty International Nigeria

“The Nigerian military's recklessness is a result of the authorities' consistent failure to hold them to account for a long list of such atrocities. These unlawful killings of civilians cannot be swept under the carpet,” said Isa Sanusi Director Amnesty International Nigeria.

“The President Bola Tinubu administration must promptly set up an independent inquiry into Tudun Biri village air strike and, where these investigations indicate criminal responsibility, ensure that those suspected to be responsible are brought to justice in fair trials. Victims and their families must be provided with access to justice and effective remedies.”

Amnesty International found that 77 people were buried in one of the two mass graves and over 17 people from nearby village who attended the religious ceremony were also buried. Dozens severely injured are currently receiving treatment at Kaduna's main hospital.

“The contradictory explanations offered by the Nigerian military so far show their complete disregard for civilian lives and suggest attempts by the authorities to cover-up these grave human rights violations. Air strikes with deadly consequences for civilians are becoming routine. This is completely unacceptable,” said Isa Sanusi

On 18 December 2022 an air strike by the Nigerian Air Force killed 64 people in Mutumji village in Zamfara state. On 24 January 2023 a military air strike killed more than 40 herders in Doma region of Nasarawa state. And, in January 2023, dozens of vigilantes were killed by a military air strike in Galadima Kogo in Niger state, central Nigeria.

The Nigerian military has consistently failed to thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate these incidents.

“The Nigerian authorities’ persistent failure to hold the military to account is encouraging impunity and increasingly endangering the lives of the civilians the military is supposed to be protecting. The result is that the military is routinely carrying out air strikes that end up killing civilians,” said Isa Sanusi

This is the deadliest air strike since the 2017 air strike on Rann village which killed 115 civilians.

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