



Muslim Public Affairs Centre

Submissions to the Inquiry into the Ongoing Violence Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria

Submitted to the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International
Freedom of Religion or Belief

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The violence between the farmers and herdsmen is more of a social and economic problem that has acquired the veneer of religion.

To be clear, the crisis between the groups involved in the incessant hostility, banditry and mutual violence is not peculiar to only this part of the world. Many similar examples abound around the world with different peculiarities but major similarities in the drivers.

For example, large section of the Roma people of Europe, like the Fulani people of the West African coast are essentially itinerant people whose way of life favour moving from one location to another, constant on the motion. For livelihood, trade or simply as a way of life. It is possible, as often is the case, that there are conflicts or hostilities between those itinerant groups and the community they meet with during their travel and short stay- the customary owners of the land they settle in.

As disputes are sometimes inevitable, in advanced countries where civic education, the instrument of law, government institutions and communal practices for dispute resolutions are present and effective, it is much easier to detect the early warning signs of impending crises and tackle the root causes of such crises in a very decisive and transparently fair manner. More so when communities that are involved, especially the faith communities are not driven by agenda, and exploiting the natural fault lines for political or narrow gains.

This is the major difference between the crisis resolution tactics and agenda in one part of the world, and the violence ridden way we have seen in the other parts.

The incessant violent conflict between farmers and headers in some parts of Nigeria is a snapshot of a much greater crises that the nation faces in terms of national security challenges and the total disregard of the sanctity of human life that has been left to fester for too long.

INTRODUCTION

The inquiry to which this submission is addressed should commit to understanding, in a fair manner, the intricate nature of the crisis, any crisis, that religion is being used to justify, promoted or scapegoated. It is easy to see the devastating nature of the crisis on our national life, and its corrosive effect on the trust, harmony and peaceful coexistence that we were all once so used to.

As a Muslim public service agency, our areas of work include encouraging dialogue and good relations among all faiths as well as making important contributions towards building an inclusive society. We therefore cherish the opportunity to make a truthful submission to the inquiry in the hope that our contributions will provide illuminating experience for the inquiry and shed light on the issues as seen and experienced by us and the faith community we belong to.

BACKGROUND

At the onset, it is important to once again highlight the political, economy and socio-cultural nuances of the crisis, which are now being de-emphasised by those wishing to sell and promote a single narrative of a stealth agenda to Fulanise and Islamise the whole country. Meanwhile nothing can be farther from the truth, as many clear examples below will show. The Muslim community in Nigeria is not a monolith, nor is the Christian community. It is therefore important not to use a single brush to paint an entire community and condemn them as a group of people bent on progressing a hidden agenda in the name of their faith. Much researches have established the link between the dwindling resources of the world, in a situation of exploding population growth, causing strain and hostility between migrant and indigenous populations. Therefore this global phenomenon has brought about, for a large part, intense confrontation and scramble for scarce resources between those itinerant groups and the customary landowners. In the case with Nigeria, the issue of farmer-herders clashes is in most cases a trans-regional phenomenon in sub-Saharan African, particularly in the West African belt.

In Nigeria, specifically in the Northern part and Middle Belt of the country where the crisis is most endemic, it is usually a confrontation, mostly violent, between the pastoral Fulani whose seasonal migration traverses from the Fouta Djallon Highland across the entire West African belt.

The **Fula people** or **Fulani** or **Fulbe** (Fula: *Fulbe*; French: *Peul*; Hausa: *Fulani* or *Hilani*; Portuguese: *Fula*; Wolof: *Pël*; Bambara: *Fulaw*), numbering between 38

and 40 million people in total, are one of the largest ethnic groups in the Sahel and West Africa, widely dispersed across the region. Inhabiting many countries, they live mainly in West Africa and northern parts of Central Africa but also in South Sudan, Sudan, and regions near the Red Sea coast.

A significant proportion of the Fula – a third, or an estimated 12 to 13 million – are pastoralists, and their ethnic group has the largest nomadic pastoral community in the world. The majority of the Fula ethnic group consisted of semi-sedentary people as well as sedentary settled farmers, artisans, merchants and nobility. As an ethnic group, they are bound together by the Fula language, their history and their culture)

Although a large portion of the Fulani people may be or claim to be Muslim, there is no doubt that all of them are not (More than 90% of the Fula are Muslims). And this is the case with the non-Muslim communities of affected farmers who have population of Muslim amongst them. So, by the sheer character of the identities of those caught in the crises, the perpetrators and those innocent civilians on both sides, there is no clear cut separation across religious line.

Reference (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fula_people)

The above brief introduction places in perspective the Fulani demographics. On the face of it, it is easy to ascribe any social crisis that they are involved in, either as victims of perpetrators, to their acclaimed religion. But we must not give in to

this lazy thinking. Here lies the crucible of the 'farmers and herders' clashes in the country. There is actually no proof, explicit or implicit, present or in the past, that directly links the violence of the Fulani headers, in the case of those attacks initiated by them to a campaign to forcefully convert people to Islam or "Fulanise" a section or the whole country, whatever that word actually means. Yet, many violent attacks, unprovoked and similarly gory in nature, have been initiated and perpetrated by those wishing to push back what they consider the invasion of the Fulani headers. In several cases, there had been numerous cases of people caught inflicting terrible violence on their own communities just so they may promote the negative propaganda of suffering from Fulani headers, and winning the sympathy of both the local and international community. In each of the reported case of communal violence involving the Muslims and Christians, the question must be asked: who has the motive, and who benefits from such a crisis?

In further addressing the causal factors of the incessant crisis, it must be understood that where interests (economic, social, political and religious) clash, there is bound to be manipulation and this not exclusive to any religious or ethnic group. Manipulation is a common practice but sadly, in this trade, the first casualty is the truth. Without doubt, the fierce war being waged against corruption by the Nigerian government, the direct and clear cessation of certain privileges some individuals that have held and profited from powerful position have become like those dwindling resources, and using religion as the bogeyman, deliberate mischaracterization of a common threat to national

security, putting on the mask of advocates against the raging violence or being seen to be fighting against imminent existential threats are all ploys to win the sympathy of the international community and seek refuge against the long arm of the law reaching them in the war against corruption.

For instance, the inflammatory utterances and unsubstantiated assertions of the Christian Association of Nigeria or the Nigerian Christian Elders Forum tend to promote sustaining the violent way of life of the perpetrators on both sides, sometimes justifying the provocation and actual violence of some within the community they claim to represent or speak for.

Having stated the above in our bid to set the context to have better understanding of the factors that contribute to the conflict between the farmers and herders, we wish to address the specific questions raised by the inquiry in your request to us as follows:

1. What are the principal drivers of the violence? [1] [SEP]

Proliferation of fire arms, in wrong hands and with little or no visible action taken against those caught with them, trading in them or using them.

Faith champions, on both sides, exploiting their religious authority and influence to misguide and misdirect religious passion of adherents and for manipulation for their own selfish and politic ambition and goals

Extreme poverty and illiteracy which predispose the economically and socially marginalized to being used for pursuit of any selfish interest.

Weak or total lack of legal framework to punish those who act with impunity.

2. What role does religion play? Is there evidence that violence is occurring for religious reasons? Is there evidence that violence is occurring for other reasons but manifesting along religious lines? [1] [SEP]

It is easy for a nation that is populated by people who profess to belong to two different faiths that are mostly used (historically) by politicians, political leaders and certain religious leaders to divide and rule them to be easily convinced that there are actually gains in seeking solutions from the same people responsible for their travail. More than religion playing any significant role however, it is rather the socio-cultural anomie in the land that galvanizes much of the crisis. If at all, religion is only a circumstantial factor because either sides must identify with a particularly religion. For instance, much of the tribes of the Middle Belt of Nigeria, such as in Jos Plateau Region are largely Christian and animists whereas the settler-migrant population are mostly Hausa-Fulani Muslims. It is therefore convenient to use a single factor of identity to mobilize and motivate.

3. Is there evidence of the existence of organised, coordinated movements on either side which are attacking the other religious group for religious reasons? If so, have these movements occupied any territory and who is leading them?

Without doubt, there will be a small percentage of this in pockets of places around the country. But there is nothing to report, on a wide scale that will lend credence to religion being the only or most dominant factor and platform to launch a crusading campaign of terror and violence. To some extent, the reality in some cases tend to dispel the notion entirely. In Nasarawa State, there was a traditional cult-like group, Ombutse. There is now a fledging of many ethno-cultural or regional movements in the country who either takes position and indeed fan the embers of discord instead of calling for amicable solution. In Yorubaland, there is the Oodua People's Congress. The Ijaw National Congress is active in the Niger-Delta Region while the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and Indigenous People of Biafra is dominant in the Easter part of the country.

4, Are the victims of the violence disproportionately of a particular religion?

Absolutely. The Muslim Northerners have being the natural greater victims of the violence as the areas affected are mostly dominated by the Muslims. In the cases of those areas dominated by non-Muslims, such population have also received greater casualties. It is really difficult, in the absence of reliable data of actual casualties to be exact figures on the numbers of victims in all the cases.

5. How have the poor rural communities financed the acquisition of sophisticated weapons?

This is really difficult to say from our position. However, the widespread of illicit arms in many hands, including bandits, robbers, and kidnapers is

well known. In the case of rural dwellers who have used such sophisticated weapons, it is easy to conclude that those fomenting the troubles, those benefiting from them and their local or foreign sponsors are the only ones capable of putting the arms in the hands of the triggermen, who cannot read or write.

6. What Are the Actions Taken By the Federal Government?

Just last year for instance, a policy brief titled Responses to Conflicts Between Farmers and Herders in the Middle Belt of Nigeria: Mapping Past Efforts and Opportunities for Violence Prevention, authored by Kwaja, Chris M A and Ademola-Adelehin, B I was released on the phenomenon

In the comprehensive policy brief the Forum on Farmers and Herder Relations FFARN, highlighted the following actions or initiatives have been taken by the Nigerian Federal and State government;

1. Creation of Grazing Reserves:

In 1965, the Northern Nigerian Government incorporated the Fulani Amenities Proposal into the Grazing Reserve Law. This was one of the first attempts to respond to the crisis of pastoralism that was linked to emerging conflicts between farmers and herders in the country. By 1980, Nigeria had established 2.3 million hectares of grazing reserves, although this figure represented only eleven percent of the planned size (Iro, 2009), which later failed due to instability of government and change of policies. The government acquired less than five percent of the ten million hectares proposed as grazing land (N.L.P.D. record

1992). Of the forty-five planned dams, twenty-four have been completed. Five borehole have been sunk. Of the expected 722 roads, 150 have been built, showing a huge deficit.

Establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education:

The National Commission for Nomadic Education was established by Decree 41 Of 1989 (now Cap 243 LFN 1990) to provide education to the nomadic pastoralists and migrant fisher folks whose population exceeds 9.4 million people and of recent migrant farmers whose population is yet to be determined. The nomadic education programme was aimed at providing functional and relevant education that will facilitate integrating the nomads into the national life and equipping them to make favourable contributions to the nation's socio-economic development to integrate them economically and socially into the national life. It was also designed to help the pastoralists modernize their techniques of rearing cattle to maximize their economic potential, including dairy processing and marketing, animal vaccinations, and modern herding techniques (<http://www.ncne.gov.ng/about-us/>). The program on nomadic education currently suffers from dilapidated infrastructure and human resource deficits, primarily due to a lack of adequate funding from the federal government (Alabi, 2017).

Deployment of Security:

The federal government has since 2017 deployed men of the armed forces of the country to conflict areas, this has been a dominant approach to response to

farmer-herder conflict. For example, in Plateau state, a Special Task Force – Operation Safe Haven (STF-OSH) – has been deployed since 2001 to restore law and order. This Task Force is composed of officers and infantry of the armed forces, including the police, with the mandate to restore order and stability. Recently, the federal government expanded its mandate to include Kaduna state, thereby replacing Operation Harbin Kunama II, (Scorpion Sting) (Agande, 2017; Kwaja and Ademola, 2018). But there are reports that security agencies who are part of STF-OSH sent to protect at-risk farmer and herder communities have committed crimes and human rights violations, such as physical torture, extortion, and other forms of gender-based violence against the communities they were deployed to protect. In fact, the deployment of security agencies has often had the unintended consequence of breeding local resentment and further increasing divides, as many communities perceive them to be biased with one side. This perceived or actual bias risks alienating the communities and people they are meant to protect.

The National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016:

In 2016, the National Assembly attempted to pass legislation to address conflicts between farmers and herders through the controversial National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016, which ultimately was not passed. This is largely due to the fact that the Land Use Act of 1978 vests all powers related to the regulation of ownership, alienation, acquisition, administration, and management of Nigerian land with the state governors.⁹ This attempt and others by the National Assembly to legislate on grazing reserves were in violation

of the Land Use Act of 1978 and perceived as a move to usurp the powers of the governors. State-level Legislations Prohibiting Open Grazing: Benue State Government enacted the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017, on May 22, 2017, in response to the lingering conflict between farmers and herders in the state. Implementation of the law began on November 1, 2017. In the wake of the Benue State legislation, other states have considered similar legislation to respond to lingering conflicts between farmers and herders within their borders. For instance, the Taraba State Governor also signed the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill 2017 into law on July 24, 2017, to begin implementation on January 24, 2018. More analysis on the state level legislation in Benue and opportunities for violence prevention is contained in The Implications of the Open-Grazing Prohibition & Ranches Establishment Law on Farmer - Herder Relations in the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

The Great Green Wall Initiative: In response to the economic, political, and security challenges posed by climate variability and environmental degradation, the African Union introduced the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in 2007. The GGWI set out to create an 8,000km (nearly 5,000 miles) of trees along the southern Sahel, accompanied by rural development and ecosystem management initiatives, to combat the encroaching desertification of the Sahara Desert. In 2013, the Nigerian government answered the call by establishing the Great Green Wall Agency (GGWA) to fight desertification, which has been responsible for the migration of herders from the northern part

of the country to the Middle Belt region in search of water and pasture (Kwaja, 2013). The purpose of the GGWA is to create a green shelter-belt (wind-breaking trees), in the front line states of Borno, Katsina, Kebbi, and Zamfara, to protect the northern part of the country against desert encroachment. The GGWA has established orchards and nurseries in northern Nigeria, as well as solar and wind-powered boreholes, but their activities have slowed down due to funding challenges from the federal government (Fulani 2017; Kwaja and Ademola, 2018).

The Federal Government's Comprehensive Livestock Development Plan: In 2015, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) formulated what was referred to as a "comprehensive livestock development plan." The plan was to address lingering conflict between farmers and herders across the country and develop grazing reserves as well as cattle routes, through a review of the existing program. Despite the fact that the Central Bank of Nigeria release the sum of N100 billion (nearly USD \$300 million) to the 36 states for this purpose, no state has been able to construct a ranch, reserve, or address the issue of stock route due to poor commitment to the issue (Kwaja and Ademola, 2018).

Therefore, it can hardly be substantiated that there is likelihood of government collision in the criminal attacks and reprisal attacks of the communities that have resorted to arms to take up arms to resolve problems that have been witnessed in other climes and effectively tackled using legal means and political solutions.

Disappointingly, the spread of fake news and misinformation has also impacted on the conflict. Recent instances of viral fake news circulating around social media have fueled the tensions between the Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria as readers are continuously been misinformed about the situation of things.

“In July, a picture of a woman dressed in traditional Muslim clothes training with an AK-47 rifle was shared on Christian Arise Network, a Nigerian WhatsApp group, with the caption “Fulanis teaching their wives how to handle [a] gun but we are busy calling [on the] UN to come and help us. Hmmm.”

(<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/how-fake-news-nigeria-compounds-challenges-co-existence>)

There have also been several instances of fake pictures circulating on social media which users are falsely claiming are linked to the communal violence, thus inflaming already high tensions in Nigeria.

“A gruesome image of a woman face down in a pool of blood with a gaping shoulder wound is purported to be from the recent attacks. It has hundreds of retweets on Twitter, but it first appeared on the internet in 2011 in a story about domestic violence in Nigeria.” (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44655148>)

I believe the most practical steps that can be taken to address this issue is to sensitise and educate the people on how to filter the news. The Government, Tech companies and civil-society organisations like ourselves would do well to

educate citizens on how to spot and counter fake news. We have made several publications and videos making tools of the YALI Checks (<https://yali.state.gov/checks/>) to enlighten the public and educate them on combatting fake news and encouraging peaceful co-existence through our Interfaith dialogue programmes.

MPAC Nigeria has also been active on social media to track and debunk fake news via our social media handles. We have also responded to a number of these issues in our publications. Today, thousands of Nigerian Muslims rely on the services we provide at MPAC and thousands more from around the world visit our website for news every day. This is as a result of the significant challenges we face in dealing with Muslim-related issues in a heightened Islamophobic environment. To ensure fair reporting, MPAC maintains editorial and financial independence, with no sectarian or political allegiance to any particular group or movement.

At the Muslim Public Affairs Center, MPAC Nigeria, we feel strongly that religious and faith based organisations are best equipped to address such issues with sincerity of purpose and true commitment rather than escalating it to a disproportionate dimension capable of throwing the country into chaos or simply playing the victim game with clearly no empirical proof.

In the farmers/herders clashes, what we have seen is clearly a vicious cycle of attacks and counter attacks by two or more groups belonging to the two dominant faith communities, but who clearly do not act on behalf of or in the name of their faiths. Without doubt, because the region that is vastly ravaged

by the crisis, and the sheer proportion of Muslim population in the different areas within the region, it is natural that the larger proportion of the victims of the crisis have been Muslims, although not vocal about their tragedy.

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that the interfaith relationship between the Muslim and Christian communities in Nigeria have experienced a level of strain that is yet to be fully understood. There have risen men and women who are willing and ready to disfigure the face of the religion they profess to practice and using every excuse to force confrontations and effectively promoting conflicts for selfish gains.

The global onslaught on Islam, the risen tide of Islamophobia, the anti-Islam and terrorist actions of violent groups like Boko Haram and their Christian versions have also provided suitable environment for destructive and poisonous rhetoric and public outburst to thrive and become respected.

We must acknowledge that over the years it is not as if government is insensitive to the clear warning signs of the crisis. However, as population grows and urbanisation increases, there are is tendencies for stress on land and natural resources as groups contest and claim access to ownership of land and natural resources. Therefore, policies of land distribution are not uncommon.

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ABOUT MPAC

Muslim Public Affairs Centre (MPAC), Nigeria, is a leading public service and leadership development organisation that operates on the core Islamic values of justice, mercy, human dignity, freedom, equality for all and sanctity of human life. MPAC is a project based and volunteer-driven organisation, covering Project, Outreach, Advocacy and Lobbying, with the mission to serve humanity and work for an inclusive society. As a public service agency working for the rights of all Muslims, for the integration of Islam into Nigerian pluralism, MPAC actively works for a positive relationship between Nigerian Muslims and other elements in the society. Thus establishing the Nigerian Muslim identity as a positive and constructive element of Nigerian pluralism.

OUR CORE VALUES

Mercy: "We sent thee (O Muhammad) not, but as a Mercy for all creatures"
(Quran 21:107)

Justice: "O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over (the claims of) either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desire, lest you swerve from justice: for if you distort (the truth), behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do!"(Quran 4:135)

Peace: "If they seek peace, then seek you peace. And trust in God for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things." (Quran 8:61)

Human Dignity: "Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on all the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured them far above most of Our creation." (Quran 17:70)

Freedom: "There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever rejects Satan (and what he calls to) and believes in Allah, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handhold, which shall not break off, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing. "(Quran 2:256) "He who is rightly guided, it is for himself; and he who goes astray, it is to his own detriment. No soul can bear another's burden." (Quran 17: 15)

Equality for All: "O men! Behold, we have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all- knowing, all-aware."(Quran 49:13)

Sanctity of All Human Life: Nor take life- which Allah has made sacred - except for just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority (to demand retaliation or to forgive): but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life, for he is helped (by the Law) (Quran 17:33)

(Imam Al-Ghazali has quoted this verse and drew the conclusion that "in respect of the sanctity of life and the prohibition of aggression against it, Muslims and non-Muslims are equal. Attack on the personal safety of non-Muslims invokes the same punishment in this world and the Hereafter". [Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Huquq al-Insan*, p. 54])

"Do not kill yourselves, for verily Allah has been to you most merciful" (Quran 4: 29)

"... take not life which Allah has made sacred" (Quran 6:151)