Nigeria

A trama healing workshop for victims of anti-Christian violence

"The gunmen were asking students if they were Christians or Muslims, and then asked Christian victims to deny Christ. Christian students who refused to do so were killed by the gunmen instantly."

An eyewitness described the carnage after a Christian student was elected in a university students' union poll in Adamawa state, Nigeria, in October 2012. Armed attackers went from door to door at a university housing complex, calling out their 46 victims by name before they shot them, stabbed them or slit their throats.

Scenes such as these are common in Nigeria. The Islamist group Boko Haram, which was linked to this attack, vowed in March 2012 to wipe out Christians from the North of the country in order to create an Islamic state there. The group is thought to have killed over 3,000 people since 2009; barely a week goes by without news of a new attack on Christians or security forces. Boko Haram militants assassinate Christians in their homes in cold blood as well as targeting churches, and children, pregnant women and the elderly are not spared. Tensions between the mainly Christian South of Nigeria and the North, which is about 93% Muslim, have been the cause of much violence, particularly in Middle Belt states where Christians and Muslims are approximately equal in number.

The re-election of Christian president Goodluck Jonathan in 2011 sparked a violent rampage across the Northern states, and Christians in the more volatile places have been at risk of attack ever since. Christians in Northern states have also long suffered discrimination, including restrictions on church buildings and ill-treatment of their children at school. They also have to submit in some respects to elements of sharia law that have been introduced in some states.

Although parts of Nigeria came into contact with Christianity as early as the fifteenth century, the principal phase of mission activity began in the nineteenth century. Both Western and African-American missionaries were involved. In the colonial period the mission agencies established rural networks of education and health care, some of which still exist.

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