

Holy Week attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria leave nearly 100 dead



Burned vehicles after Good Friday raid on April 7, 2023, in Ngban, Benue state, Nigeria. | Courtesy of Justice, Development, and Peace Commission

by Douglas Burton | April 10, 2023

At least 94 people reportedly have died in a series of deadly attacks on Christian communities throughout Holy Week in Benue state in north-central Nigeria, an ominous sign of escalating violence blamed on Muslim militias in the country's Middle Belt region. On April 2, armed men **reportedly** stormed a Palm Sunday service at a Pentecostal church in Akenawe-Tswarev in Logo county, Benue state, killing a young boy and kidnapping the pastor and other worshippers.

Three days later, on April 5, gunmen killed at least 50 people in the village of Umogidi, located in Utokpo county, a Catholic stronghold in western Benue, the Associated Press **reported**.

More recently, on the night of Good Friday, dozens were killed when Muslim gunmen raided an elementary school building in the village of Ngban that serves as a shelter for about 100 displaced Christian farmers and their families.

The April 7 **attack** left 43 people dead and more than 40 injured, according to Father Remigius Ihyula, who heads the Benue branch of the Justice, Development, and Peace Commission (JDPC), a Nigerian Catholic relief organization.

Hours before the attack, Benue's outgoing governor, Samuel Ortom, speaking in Otukpo, **warned residents** to remain vigilant and criticized what he sees as a slow response on the part of police and army units to respond to his requests for help. Ortom had demanded for four years that federal laws be changed to allow citizens to buy firearms for self-defense, without success.



Residents of Ngban, Benue state, Nigeria, on April 8, 2023, the day after gunmen killed at least 43 people and injured another 40. Courtesy of Justice, Development, and Peace Commission

A JDPC relief worker who asked to remain anonymous told CNA she arrived the next morning to care for survivors and spoke to police officers manning the checkpoint near the school.

“Some of the survivors told me that police had fought the attackers and possibly killed some of them, but the marauding band retrieved their dead on their way out of the school compound, and the police told me the same,” she said.

“I doubt that the survivors of the attack on the primary school could go to church on Easter Sunday, as they need medicine and trauma counseling,” Father Ihyula told CNA. While visiting with survivors of the April 7 attack in Ngban, Ortom said at least 134 people were killed in attacks in Benue over five days. Included in that tally is an April 3 raid in Apa that left 47 dead, according to a **report** by ThisDaylive.com, a Nigerian news outlet. It was not immediately clear on Monday whether Christians were the targets in that attack.

Benue state has an estimated 2 million displaced persons who cannot live on their traditional farm lands for fear of being killed. Some farmers venture back to cultivate their fields during the day and retreat to displaced person camps at night.

Douglas Burton is an independent writer specializing on Nigerian terrorism from his home near Washington, DC. He began covering the campaign to retake Mosul from ISIS in 2015 and switched to covering ISIS in Nigeria in 2019. He is a former State Department official in Kirkuk Iraq.

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