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Nigeria: Jos A City Torn Apart

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I. Summary

From September 7 to 13, 2001, Jos, the capital of Plateau State in central Nigeria, became the scene of mass killing and destruction for the first time in its recent history. Hundreds of people were killed and tens of thousands displaced in less than one week. Violence suddenly erupted between Christians and Muslims in a city where diverse communities had coexisted peacefully for years and which had prided itself on avoiding the inter-communal violence that had plagued neighboring states. Three months later, the inhabitants of Jos are still counting their dead and assessing the massive damage done to their homes and property. While the total number of victims is not yet confirmed, initial figures compiled by local human rights groups, religious communities and other organizations indicate that more than 1,000 people were killed in just six days.

Human Rights Watch researchers visited Jos less than one month after the violence. The town was still reeling from the devastation. The violence had shocked people deeply. One man told Human Rights Watch: “People never dreamed this could happen in Jos.” Another said: “If this can happen in Jos, nowhere is safe anymore.” At a superficial level, a semblance of normality had returned to parts of the city and commercial and other daily activities were gradually resuming. However, some villages on the outskirts of Jos had been almost completely destroyed; they lay abandoned and empty. In the center of town too, extensive damage to mosques, churches, schools, shops, homes, and vehicles was clearly visible.

The violence in Jos coincided with the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington in the United States. International coverage of the situation in Jos was inevitably overshadowed by these events. What little coverage there was prior to September 11 had tended to portray the violence in Jos as a religious conflict, with Christians and Muslims attacking each other because of their faith. In reality, the conflict was more political and economic than religious. It stemmed from a longstanding battle for control of political power and economic rivalry between different ethnic groups and between those labeled “indigenous” or “non-indigenous” inhabitants of the area. As grievances built up over time, appeal to

religious sentiments was used by both sides to manipulate popular emotions and eventually to inflame the situation to a level where it could no longer be controlled. Christians and Muslims, “indigenes” and “non-indigenes,” became both perpetrators and victims.

Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed Muslim and Christian survivors and eye-witnesses of the violence—many of whom were still displaced and living in camps after their homes were destroyed—as well as a range of other individuals and organizations in Jos, including human rights activists, members of other non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, journalists, students, and academics. Many were still waiting for news of their family members, friends or colleagues, having lost trace of them during the violence, not knowing whether they had been killed or whether they were among the thousands of displaced people who had fled the area and not yet returned.

Opinions about who was primarily to blame for the outbreak of violence varied and were sometimes highly polarized. However, all those interviewed by Human Rights Watch agreed on one conclusion: that the violence could have been foreseen but that government authorities failed to take action to prevent it. The state government adopted a passive attitude and appeared not to take seriously the numerous, explicit threats issued by both “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” groups in Jos in the weeks leading up to the crisis. All those interviewed also deplored the lack of police presence and intervention during the crisis and the failure of the police to ensure protection and security for the population. Eventually—but only after many lives had been lost—it was the military, not the police, who intervened to restore law and order. Human Rights Watch made repeated attempts to meet state government authorities and senior police officers in Jos to seek their accounts of events; however, they were not available to meet us. In November 2001, as this report is being prepared, two commissions of inquiry, one appointed by the federal government and the other by the Plateau state government, have recently begun their investigations into what occurred.

This report does not attempt to document in an exhaustive way the events that took place in Jos between September 7 and 13. Rather it provides an overview of the crisis

and identifies some of its principal causes. It is based primarily on research carried out by Human Rights Watch in Jos in early October 2001 and on telephone interviews with sources in Jos at the time of the violence, from early September onwards.

II. Recommendations

These recommendations are formulated specifically in response to the violence in Jos in September 2001. However, they are also relevant to addressing inter-communal conflicts in other parts of Nigeria.

To the Nigerian Government

- Ensure that the federal and state commissions of inquiry that have been set up in response to the September 2001 crisis in Jos carry out full, independent and impartial investigations and make their findings public. They should investigate, among other aspects, the reasons for the failure of government and police authorities to respond to early warning signs of impending violence and to control the violence once it had started. The commissions of inquiry should also make recommendations to prevent a repetition of the events of September 2001.
- Identify and prosecute those found responsible for organizing and carrying out the violence.
- Appoint appropriate authorities to check the files of detainees held in connection with the crisis and ensure the release of those against whom there is no evidence of participation in criminal acts.
- Investigate reports of human rights violations by members of the police and the military during the crisis, including unlawful arrests and detention, ill-treatment and extrajudicial executions, and bring to justice those found responsible, in particular for the extrajudicial execution of twenty-two detainees at Jos Prison on September 9-10, 2001.
- Ensure that the police are adequately trained, prepared and equipped to prevent and respond to any further outbreak of violence in the future. Ensure that they respond promptly and appropriately to any warnings or early signs of tension to ensure that the population is adequately protected, without resorting to excessive use of force or human rights abuses.
- Work closely with community leaders from all groups, at national and local levels, to encourage efforts to ensure calm and harmonious relationships across the religious and ethnic divides.

- Enforce tight regulation of the possession of weapons in order to prevent another situation in which a large number of civilians can be quickly armed and equipped to participate in mass killings and destruction. Particular attention should be paid to the control of weapons brought in from neighboring states in Nigeria that are experiencing conflict.
- Provide assistance to people internally displaced by the conflict in Jos, including reconstruction of homes and facilities which were destroyed, and adequate protection in their home areas to enable those who wish to do so to return safely, as early as possible.
- Consider the grievances of the communities affected by the conflict and address any legitimate complaints; in particular, take steps to redress the inequalities created by the division between “indigenes” and “non-indigenes,” in terms of rights and access to opportunities. Most importantly, the Nigerian government has an international obligation to provide all Nigerians with equal protection of the law and to prohibit discrimination.

To Foreign Governments with Diplomatic and Economic Links with Nigeria, in Particular the United Kingdom and the United States

- Urge the Nigerian Government to implement the recommendations above, in particular to ensure that the commissions of inquiry into the Jos crisis are able to work effectively and independently and make their reports public; and that individuals found responsible for organizing and carrying out the violence are brought to justice without delay.
- Support grassroots initiatives by nongovernmental organizations, in particular local human rights and conflict resolution groups, to raise awareness of human rights in different communities, in particular the right to life and the need to respect religious and ethnic differences, as well as to avoid a repetition of the events of September 2001.
- Assist the Nigerian Government in providing relief and reconstruction for those displaced by the conflict.
- Integrate a strong human rights component in assistance programs for reform of the Nigerian justice system and particularly in any training of the Nigerian police or military.

III. Background

Inter-communal Violence in Nigeria

Inter-communal conflicts are not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. For decades, communities in various parts of the country have fought, often violently, for political and economic control. Thousands have died in these conflicts and successive governments have failed to take effective action to bring those responsible to justice or to prevent these clashes from recurring. While some Nigerians point out that little could be expected from past military governments, who often resorted to violent repression themselves, there were hopes that the civilian government of President Olusegun Obasanjo, which came to power in May 1999, would be more responsive.

However, since 1999, inter-communal violence in Nigeria has not abated; it may even have increased. In addition to the crisis in Jos, there were several other serious outbreaks of violence in 1999, 2000 and 2001. In 1999 and 2000, there were violent clashes in the southwest between members of the Hausa and Yoruba ethnic groups. In February and May 2000, more than seven hundred people were killed in the northern town of Kaduna and in reprisal killings in the southeast, in clashes between Muslim and Christian communities over the mooted extension of the application of Sharia (Islamic law) in Kaduna state.¹ In June and July 2001, between one hundred and two hundred people were killed in Nasarawa state in clashes between the Tiv and several other ethnic groups. The longstanding conflict between the Tiv and the Jukun in neighboring Taraba and Benue states also continued, culminating in October 2001 in the massacre of more than two hundred civilians by the military in Benue state in reprisal for the killing of nineteen soldiers.² In July and August 2001, violence broke out between Christians and Muslims in Bauchi state, apparently in response to the introduction of Sharia law there. In October 2001, further violence

¹ Since 1999, several states in the north of Nigeria have extended the application of Sharia law to criminal cases; previously, it had only been applied to personal status law. The extension of Sharia has been controversial; it has been strongly opposed by some Christian groups, even though it is supposed to apply only to Muslims. Judgments handed down by Sharia criminal courts in 2000 and 2001 have included punishments such as floggings, amputations and death by stoning.

² See *Nigeria: Soldiers massacre civilians in revenge attack in Benue State*, Human Rights Watch news release, October 25, 2001.

erupted in the northern city of Kano following protests against the United States military attacks on Afghanistan.³

The Crisis in Jos: Possible Causes and Warning Signs

Unlike other parts of Nigeria, which have experienced inter-communal violence with tragic regularity, Jos, until September 2001, had always been viewed as a peaceful city. To many Nigerians, the Plateau State motto of “Home of Peace and Tourism” was more than an empty slogan. Indeed, many people fleeing conflicts in their own areas had sought protection and safety in Jos; some had even settled there. Some observers believe that this regular influx of populations from neighboring states may have ended up destabilizing the tranquility of Jos. People fleeing in 2000 and 2001 from clashes in Kaduna, Bauchi, Taraba, and Nasarawa states may have inadvertently contributed to creating an atmosphere of fear among inhabitants of Plateau State by testifying to the atrocities they had left behind, some of which were still continuing. The increase in the population in Jos, in particular, also created an increase in economic pressures, leading in turn to the scarcity of some goods and increase in prices. Resources became stretched, and tensions began to rise.⁴

Plateau State, including its capital Jos, is inhabited by both Christians and Muslims. Christians are in the majority, with Muslims constituting a significant minority.⁵ It is home to several ethnic groups, which fall into two broad categories: those who consider themselves “indigenes” or original inhabitants of the area—among them the Birom, the Afizere and the Anaguta—and those who are termed “non-indigenes” or “settlers,” composed in large part of Hausa (the majority ethnic group in northern Nigeria), but also of southern Igbo, Yoruba and other ethnic groups. Some of the “settlers,” notably the Hausa, have been living in the area for several generations. Neither the “indigenes” nor the “settlers” are monolithic in religious terms, but Christianity tends to be the dominant religion among the indigenes, while Islam is the dominant religion among the settlers.

³ This is not an exhaustive list of incidents of inter-communal violence in Nigeria since 1999.

⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Imran Abdulrahman, national coordinator of the Centre for Peace Initiative and Development (CEPID) and lecturer at the University of Jos, September 30, 2001.

⁵ No accurate statistics are available on the proportion of Christians and Muslims.

The strain between “indigenes” and “non-indigenes” has been most visible in Jos in the competition for political posts. In 1994, there were the first signs of violence and attacks on religious institutions following the appointment of a Muslim as sole administrator of Jos North local government area.⁶ There were tensions over other public appointments in 1996 and again in 1998. The case, which contributed most directly to the outbreak of hostilities in September 2001, was the appointment of the poverty eradication coordinator in Jos North in August, a few weeks before the crisis.⁷ The appointment of Mukhtar Muhammad, a Hausa, was controversial: in December 1998, during the transition to civilian rule, he had been forced to stand down as chairman of the newly-elected Jos North local government after he was accused of falsifying his credentials. His subsequent appointment to the coveted post of poverty eradication coordinator was seen by some as a provocation and was strongly opposed by Christian groups.

While some of the questions raised about the poverty eradication coordinator’s appointment may have been legitimate, the protests soon escalated into an ugly exchange of abuse in the days leading up to September 7. Some groups seized the opportunity to launch personal attacks on Mukhtar Muhammad, posting death threats at his office, such as “Trace your roots before it is too late,” “Run for your life,” “You are warned once again not to step in,” “This office is not meant for Hausa-Fulani or any non-indigene,” “Mukhtar Muhammad is a wanderer. If you want to stay alive don’t step in.”⁸

Tensions were further inflamed by leaflets which began circulating in the name of an organization called Hausa-Fulani Youths (Under 25), which contained explicit threats towards “indigenes,” such as: “Yes, the loss of a few families wouldn’t bother us. After all for every single Anaguta’s [indigene] life and their allies; there are thousands of other Hausa-Fulanis. Let’s see who blinks first.” “Death is the best friend of Hamas. Be rest assured that we will do it even better.” “The seat is dearer to

⁶ During this period of military rule, officials were not elected.

⁷ The poverty eradication coordinator is appointed by the federal government since the program is a federal one; the appointment is usually made on the recommendation or advice of the state governor. The local government area of Jos North includes the main commercial area of the town, so this appointment is seen as important and influential.

⁸ Letter to the Governor of Plateau State from the Jasawa Development Association, entitled “Threat to peace and security in Jos North Local Government Area,” August 20, 2001.

us than our lives. In that case, do you have the monopoly of violence?” “Blood for blood. We are ready.”⁹

Anonymous leaflets propagating the extension of Sharia law in Plateau State were also circulated. A man distributing some of these leaflets, who was arrested, reportedly confessed to being a Christian in disguise. Similarly, some Hausas alleged that a compilation of documents attributed to Hausa groups had effectively been forged and that a Christian group had attached an unrelated list of signatures of Muslim leaders to the leaflets, apparently in a bid to incriminate particular prominent individuals.

At a more formal level, there was an angry exchange of correspondence addressed to the Plateau State governor by Christian and Muslim groups. The language used by both groups revealed deeply-held grievances caused by the divide between “indigenes” and “non-indigenes.” In a letter to the governor dated August 20, the Jasawa¹⁰ Development Association complained about the Christian protests that had described Mukhtar Muhammad as a “non-indigene”; the letter also protested about the refusal of the chairman of Jos North Local Government “to issue Indigene Certificates to members of our community.”¹¹ We met the Chairman and explained our position. He resisted vehemently and insisted we must go back to wherever we originated.”¹² The (Christian) Plateau State Youths retorted on August 28 with a letter to the government entitled “Enough is Enough.” Protesting at the actions and propaganda of Hausa organizations, the letter gave the governor an ultimatum: “We are finally giving you sir and the security operatives 48 hours to call these so called Jasawa to order OR we will SURELY call them to order.”¹³ In a press conference on August 31, the Plateau State Youth Council stated: “The constitution of Nigeria allows

⁹ Copies provided to Human Rights Watch by human rights and religious organizations in Jos, October 2001.

¹⁰ Jasawa is a term used to describe Hausas living in Jos.

¹¹ Indigene certificates are supposed to be issued by the local government of the area from which people originate. Settler populations, such as the Hausas in Plateau State and other groups in other parts of the country, have generally not been able to obtain these certificates from their area of residence, even though some of them may have been living there for several generations. Practices and criteria for issuing indigene certificates vary from state to state.

¹² Letter to the Governor of Plateau State from the Jasawa Development Association, entitled “Threat to peace and security in Jos North Local Government Area,” August 20, 2001.

¹³ Letter to the Governor of Plateau State in the name of “concern Plateau State Youths,” entitled “Enough is Enough,” August 28, 2001.

‘any’ citizen of the country to live in any place of his/her choice, therefore any person or group of persons is/are welcome to stay in Plateau State. Equally the constitution recognizes the rights of the indigenes place as the owners of that given place. Funny and insulting that a Hausa/Fulani man from Bauchi, Kano, Katsina etc. who is looking for pasture and trade ‘settled’ in Jos among the indigenes of Afizere, Anaguta and Berom only to wake up one day to lay claim to a place leased to them for peaceful co-existence [...]”. The letter went on to call for the position of poverty eradication coordinator to be given exclusively to indigenes and for all Hausa-Fulani chieftaincy titles to be scrapped and replaced by indigenous traditional titles. It also called for the “immediate renaming and re-organization of all our Electoral Wards to indigenous names and original interest of our people.”¹⁴

Many people confirmed to Human Rights Watch that these exchanges heightened an already tense atmosphere in Jos and accentuated existing fears and suspicions. The Centre for Peace Initiative and Development (CEPID), a conflict-resolution and development organization, had anticipated a crisis as early as March 2001 and had organized workshops for youth, journalists, community, and religious leaders, as well as a media campaign on radio and television.¹⁵ In the days immediately before the crisis in September, three human rights organizations, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP), and the Christian Foundation for Social Justice and Equality, personally visited state police and government authorities to alert them to what they perceived as imminent threats to peace. Unfortunately, the authorities failed to respond.¹⁶

¹⁴ Text of the Press Conference by Plateau State Youth Council held on August 31, 2001, at the Nigeria Union of Journalist Press Centre, Jos.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Imran Abdulrahman, national coordinator of the Centre for Peace Initiative and Development (CEPID) and lecturer at the University of Jos, September 30, 2001.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with these organizations, Jos, September and October 2001.

IV. The Outbreak and Spread of the Violence

Despite these signs of increasing tension, the extent of the violence and the speed with which it engulfed the city from September 7 appeared to take everyone by surprise. Even residents of Jos who had predicted an explosion had not imagined it would take on such proportions. One man told Human Rights Watch: “This thing we thought was a joke suddenly turned into a full war situation.” By September 8, pitched battles were being fought between Christians and Muslim youths along improvised front lines, and the violence that had begun in the center of town quickly spread to the outskirts and outlying areas.

Most people interviewed by Human Rights Watch believed that the violence must have been organized in advance; they pointed to the speed with which it spread across the town and the type and number of weapons used (including widespread use of guns) as evidence of its planned nature. On the basis of its own research, Human Rights Watch believes that some level of planning was likely, but that the violence then took on a life of its own and spun out of control, as groups of primarily young men on both sides of the religious and ethnic divide retaliated and sought to avenge real or rumored attacks by those perceived as their “enemies,” often ignoring appeals for restraint by their community leaders. There were reports of youths destroying buildings and houses of the opposing faith after hearing rumors—some of which later turned out to be false—that their own communities or areas had been attacked. At times the chaos and speed of events was such that people did not know who was fighting whom. Overall, eye-witness accounts did not point to any clear chain of command at the time of the attacks, although they reported that some assailants were explicitly encouraging others to fight.

The specific incident that sparked off the violence occurred outside a mosque in the area of Jos known as Congo Russia. On Friday, September 7, a young Christian woman tried to cross the road through a congregation of Muslims outside the mosque. She was asked to wait until prayers had finished or to choose another route, but she refused and an argument developed between her and some members of the congregation. Within minutes, the argument had unleashed a violent battle between

groups of Christians who appeared at the scene and Muslims who had been praying at the mosque or who happened to be in the neighborhood.

A teacher who was in the congregation at the time described what happened:¹⁷

On that Friday I was in the congregation at the mosque. I was sitting outside. I noticed a girl, about twenty years old, who was talking with someone who was blocking her way. They were just talking, not shouting. The girl then raised her voice and accused the man of refusing to let her pass. He showed her another route she could take. She insisted that she must go through the congregation. He let her through. When the imam was about to start the sermon, she returned the same way, insisting that she must pass again. The attendant asked her why she needed to pass again. He said the sermon was about to start and she could go the other way. She said: “Who are you to stop me passing? No one will stop me.” Then they started arguing. She was abusing the attendant. I heard their conversation. Two men who were the girl’s neighbors took her to one side to calm her down and explained that the attendant was just doing his duty and she should wait until the end of the prayer. She didn’t listen and started shouting. She picked up a stone as if to throw it and said: “Who are you to stop me? Even if I kill you, nothing will happen.” A young man intervened and got angry. He went towards her to take the stone from her. He grabbed her hand, there was a tussle and he slapped her. She shouted.

Then a group of about twenty or thirty youths came out from between the houses, holding stones, sticks, bows and arrows. They started attacking cars and people. A man in the congregation was hit in the shoulder with an arrow. He was the first victim. Car windows were smashed. It was chaos.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 2, 2001.

The imam was asking people to keep calm. Some members of the congregation stood up. The imam and others tried to control them and started reciting prayers. Outside the mosque people in the first ten rows placed tables to block the advance of the youths. The rest of the congregation was still praying. When the prayers were finished, the situation got out of control. I went home. I later heard that another man, Anagogo, who is in his fifties, was hit in the head. His was the first death. He is physically handicapped so he couldn't run away.

The youths who attacked were mainly from the Congo area. They looked like street boys, not like responsible people. Some were teenagers, others were in their twenties. They were wearing shorts and singlets. They didn't have guns. I don't know whether it was organized, but they all came out when the girl shouted.

The previous week, the same girl had come and done the same thing. The attendant had allowed her to pass. He told me that this was in fact the third week running that she had tried to pass through the congregation on a Friday.

As I was leaving the mosque, I passed another mosque on Bauchi Road. The congregation was dispersing after prayers. As they passed the bridge they saw the commotion around the Congo mosque. Some of the youths ran to the original crisis point. By the time I reached my house, I had already seen three dead bodies, within just a few meters. A car and a motorbike were burnt in front of my house. Youths came in from other neighborhoods and were breaking into shops and looting. They put all the objects in the main road and set them on fire.

From my house I have a clear view of the mosque. That same Friday at 8 p.m., I heard shouting. I looked out from upstairs. There was a clash between Christians and Muslims. They were throwing petrol bombs. I also heard a gun—I don't know from which side. This carried on until 11 p.m. There were no police or soldiers. Someone climbed the minaret

and was trying to break the railing on the mosque. He broke the zinc off the rooftop and called for fire. He was given fire and set the mosque ablaze, as well as neighboring houses.

At about midnight I saw a military vehicle; a group of soldiers stopped in front of my house. I heard the soldiers say: “In five minutes, everyone must be inside their house or we’ll start shooting.” But then they just left. So people came back out and the rampage continued until about 1 a.m. My neighbors came to stay in my house because their house was burnt. I saw fire further away in the night, in different areas.

Many people were killed later. There was heavy rain and bodies were floating in the river. I saw them the next day and about one week later. Eight days later, I saw two dead bodies in the river behind the mosque. Some dead bodies were set ablaze. Some people were killed then their bodies were put in cars and burnt.

One of my friends, Abdul Ra’uf, a young man, is still missing. I just saw the remains of his vehicle. We have told his wife she should prepare to live as a widow. We don’t know what happened to him.

The leader of the mosque at Congo Junction gave his own account of what happened:¹⁸

On September 7, at about 1.40 p.m., I went to the mosque. I noticed three or four Christian youths coming out. They shook their heads then went away; maybe they thought there weren’t enough Muslims there yet. About ten or fifteen minutes later, they came out again; I could see them from inside. By that time, the attendance at the mosque was higher. Then I heard some noise outside. I asked what was happening. I was told that a woman was trying to cross the line. I spoke into the

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, 1 October, 2001.

loudspeaker and said she should be allowed to pass. The woman was shouting. Then I saw members of the congregation throwing arrows and stones. I asked them to stop but they wouldn't. Christians also came, throwing arrows and carrying spears.

When the prayers ended, I came out. I saw a boy from the congregation, Abdulrahman, a young man of about twenty years old, who had been shot in the shoulder with an arrow. He was taken to the central mosque; they later removed the arrow and he survived. But another man, Osman Anagogo, died. He was attacked with a spear and cutlasses.

Non-Muslims started burning houses, burning the mosque and killing people, using bows and arrows, stones and spears. They were young boys and men. One man tried to kill Alhaji Garba with a cutlass and a machete. Then Muslims started attacking in revenge.

From that moment onwards, the fighting spread uncontrollably. According to testimonies from different parts of the town, the violence raged from Friday, September 7 to Monday, September 10. After a brief lull, it flared up again on Wednesday, September 12, with further killings and destruction.¹⁹ By Thursday, September 13, when the fighting ceased, hundreds of people had been killed, many others were missing, and thousands of homes, buildings, and other property had been destroyed.

Most of the perpetrators were young men, armed with a variety of weapons including sticks, bows and arrows, petrol-bombs, knives, machetes, and guns (both locally-made guns and guns believed to belong to retired soldiers). They set up roadblocks all over the town, allowing people to pass if they were of their own faith and stopping and attacking those of the opposite faith. People were targeted clearly on the basis of their religion or ethnicity. A Christian man who was stopped at a Muslim roadblock told how Muslim youths were encouraging each other to pick out as many Christians

¹⁹ Some killings also occurred on Tuesday September 11, for example in the areas of Pankshin and Heipan, both on the outskirts of Jos.

as possible, as if it were a kind of competition to see who could kill the most Christians. A Muslim leader was stopped by about eighteen Christian youths armed with sticks and machetes who were shouting “Useless Muslim!” and “Useless Hausa man!” at another Muslim ahead of him.²⁰ In some areas, Christians and Muslims set up joint patrols in a bid to limit the spread of violence, but it became difficult to maintain these once the fighting had escalated.

Most of the victims were men, but there were also women and children among the casualties. There were reports that in some cases, entire families were killed in their homes. A witness told Human Rights Watch that one house had been burnt with fourteen people inside, another with nine. Age was not always a protection. A man in his seventies was attacked once in the morning and initially spared because of his age. The same evening, he went to the mosque and called people to prayer. Later, a group of people entered his house and killed him and his children before setting fire to the house. Hajia Dada Sangei, a woman aged about ninety, was killed in Riyom, along with several other members of the family, including a thirteen-year-old boy. Alhaji Baba Wase, aged about eighty, was dragged out behind his house in Busa Buji and killed with guns and machetes on September 8; the attackers then set about destroying his house.²¹

While most of the victims were targeted on the basis of their religion, some people—including members of the same ethnic group or religion—used the chaos as an opportunity to settle scores and exact revenge on personal foes. Human Rights Watch was told of several cases where individuals suspected they were specifically sought out. One man whose house and car were burnt believed he was singled out because the attackers used his nickname which is only known to those close to him. In another case, attackers came to the house of a wealthy businessman; when the owner came out of the house, the attackers asked him where he was, by name, without realizing it was him, presumably because they had been sent to find him.²²

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Jos, October 2001.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Jos, October 2001.

²² Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 1, 2001.

At the time of writing, the total number of victims and the relative proportions of Christians and Muslims have still not been established. Various factors have hindered efforts to establish an accurate count or list of victims. The perpetrators burned many of their victims' bodies, some beyond recognition; many bodies were buried in mass graves or removed by soldiers from where they lay along the roads or in gutters before there had been time to identify them; and of the thousands who fled or were displaced by the violence, some have not yet returned. All those interviewed by Human Rights Watch believed that several hundred people, and probably more than 1,000, had been killed. Some put the figure between 1,000 and 2,000. Local human rights groups who began their investigations as soon as the violence began had reached a figure of around 1,000 by Monday, September 10²³—a total which excludes further killings that took place on Wednesday, September 12.

Saturday, September 8 was described by some witnesses as the fiercest day. A Christian woman who lived on a street bordering the predominantly Christian area of Apata and the mixed Christian-Muslim area of Ali Kazaure described the sequence of events there:²⁴

On Friday [...] as I was heading home, I ran into the confusion. Everyone was running. On Apata Street, at about 4 p.m., tires were being burnt and young men had barricaded the streets. I managed to get home. Later at night, tires were still burning. The nursery school behind my house, which belongs to Muslim women, was destroyed. They made a bonfire with the seats from the school. Church bells were ringing and there were Muslim calls to prayer throughout the night. But there were no killings in my area on Friday.

On Saturday morning I thought it would be quieter. Little did I know it would be the day of bloodshed. In my own area houses were being burnt and people were being killed. Almost all non-Christians were

²³ This figure is based on statistics collected from Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH), Plateau State Hospital, several mosques (including the central mosque in Jos) and various burial sites, by the NGOs Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Centre for Community Action and Participation (CAPP) and the Christian Foundation for Social Justice and Equality.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 2, 2001

killed on the street. I was watching from my house. They were shouting: “Here’s one of them!” There were lots of groups going around. I witnessed one person being killed with a stick or club and stones, and firewood; one of the attackers also had a long knife.

Muslim youths from Angwan Rogo came to Ali Kazaure. They set fire to the Fatima Catholic Cathedral near our house. They had guns and petrol bombs in bottles.

Youths from Apata were fighting those from across the street. When the Muslims came with guns, most of them ran away. Some Christians then also got guns and launched a counter-attack. In Ali Kazaure both Christian and Muslim houses were burnt. There was a battleground in the middle. In Apata, most of the houses burnt were Muslim.

In Angwan Rogo, my cousin was macheted to death and the family house demolished. Some Muslims took our surviving relatives into their house to protect them. My elder brother and his family would also have been killed if a Muslim family hadn’t saved them.

At least ten people were killed on my street, outside. I saw it with my own eyes. The victims were all men, mostly young or middle-aged.

There was hunger everywhere. Markets and shops were closed. People were fighting to buy bread in our local bakery.

By Sunday, the killings in my street had stopped. There was an uneasy calm from Sunday to Tuesday. On Wednesday it erupted again. There were three deaths on the street. The victims who were probably Muslims were killed and burnt in their car, within just two hours.

At Evangel Hospital I saw a girl in her twenties who had gone into a state of shock after seeing someone beheaded. She never came out of the shock. The hospital staff told me she died a few days later.

V. Attacks on Muslims

Destruction of Dilimi

The village of Dilimi, on the outskirts of Jos, was one of the areas that suffered the most intense destruction. Inhabited in majority by Muslims, virtually the entire village was razed to the ground. Human Rights Watch researchers visited Dilimi on October 6 in the company of displaced residents who were returning there for the first time since they fled. There was almost nothing there but rubble. Only a few buildings belonging to Christians had been left standing. The rest—about four thousand houses, eleven mosques, and two schools—had been systematically destroyed. The confirmed death toll of nine was surprisingly low, thanks to the concerted decision by Muslim residents to flee as quickly as possible once the violence started. Once they had fled, Christian groups returned to the empty village and proceeded to destroy or loot everything that was left behind.

The violence in Dilimi did not start until Sunday, September 9. It was initially forestalled by Birom and Hausa leaders who worked together to prevent youths from both communities from taking revenge after hearing of attacks against their own people in other parts of Jos. A Hausa businessman and community leader explained: “On Saturday morning, indigenes from the town came to Dilimi saying their parents had been killed in Jos. They told indigenes in the village to take revenge on Muslims. We said: ‘No, we’ve been living together for the past eight years peacefully, therefore forget what has happened in Jos and protect our village from any crisis.’ We got together with them and carried out joint patrols, Hausas and Biroms together, throughout Saturday.”

They patrolled together successfully until the Sunday morning, when some Birom youths started challenging their elders. “They wanted to know why their elders were stopping them from fighting. They were asking them: ‘Why should these Hausas, these strangers, come to our area and become richer than us?’ They asked their elders to let them take revenge for what had been done to their people in Jos.” Several Hausa and Birom community leaders went to appeal to the police to send more policemen to the village, but were told that the police did not have enough

men because they had been posted to the crisis in other locations. By the time they returned to the village at around 11.30 a.m., houses, vehicles and tires were already on fire. By about 2 p.m., large groups of Birom youths were rampaging through the village, shooting with guns, bows and arrows, and throwing stones. The Muslims residents were completely overpowered and had no choice but to abandon their houses and run for safety. The women and children left first; the divisional police officer eventually came and escorted some of the residents to a displaced persons' camp.²⁵

Human Rights Watch spoke to residents of Dilimi who were living in a displaced persons' camp in Gangare primary school in Jos. The entire Muslim population of the village had had to be relocated there. An elderly village chief described how he survived the attack:²⁶

The attack started on Sunday at about 10 a.m. I was in my house. I noticed Biroms-local residents-surrounding the place. When I came out, I saw about three cars on fire. I asked the Biroms: "Why is this happening after we agreed not to fight?" One man came with a spear and threatened to attack me. An elderly man intervened to stop him. The Biroms were saying: "We're ready to fight the Hausas, the Hausas should vacate the village."

As I made my way to meet the community leaders, a Birom woman stopped me on the way and sent me back, warning me that I would be killed. I managed to pass through but another group surrounded me. There were about ten of them, young men. They had bows and arrows, a dagger, a sword, and locally-made weapons. They said to me: "Say your last prayers, we are going to kill you." When I knelt down, two Birom women intervened. They implored the attackers not to kill me and said otherwise they should kill them too. One of the Birom women saved me; she took me to a Birom man's house. They locked me in a

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with community leader and other residents of Dilimi, October 6, 2001.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 6, 2001, translated from Hausa.

room and I hid there for twelve hours. At about 11 p.m. I left. I was afraid that if I went out after daybreak, I was more likely to be killed.

I went into the bush in the night. I came to a house near the airforce base. The house was empty. I stayed there until daybreak. In the morning, I found my people gathered at the airforce base; they thought I had been killed.

The nine people who were killed in Dilimi included six men, two women, and a three-month-old baby. Three of the men, Baba Jenja, Mallam Abdu, and Mallam Musa, were killed as they were trying to escape; Tsoho Mohammed died in hospital. The exact circumstances of the death of Yakubu Abubakar are not known. The death of Mohammed Abdullahi, a cow-rearer in his thirties, was not discovered until his body was found two weeks later; a pile of sand in front of a house in Dilimi marks his grave. The two women who died were Hajia Lemoji Abbas, aged about fifty, and Mrs. Mohammed, aged about thirty. Both women were attacked as they were trying to flee from Dilimi with a large group of other women and children. They were intercepted by a group of Biroms who asked them to surrender their male children. When the women refused, they killed Mrs. Mohammed and seriously injured Hajia Lemoji Abbas on the head and arm; she died about ten days later. A third woman, Hajia Al Majira, aged about fifty, was still in hospital several weeks later with machete wounds on her head and hand. The three-month-old boy was on his mother's back; he was beaten with sticks and died about six hours later.²⁷

A forty-year-old woman who was with the group of fleeing women explained how they were intercepted:²⁸

We managed to run into the bush but we were stopped on the way. They told us to go back to the village. I said: 'No, let the women pass.' They said that we should leave the children behind and they would kill any male child. I have a baby boy. I disguised him as a girl by putting a

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with residents of Dilimi, Jos, October 6, 2001.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 6, 2001, translated from Hausa.

cloth over his head. Then I knelt down to say my last prayer. I told the others that they should go, that I would sacrifice myself. I was holding my son. A man hit me on the shoulder with a piece of wood. I didn't feel the pain at the time but later I realized I was bleeding. One man who had a gun said he wanted to shoot me. Another man said no and they started arguing amongst themselves. I took advantage of this and ran away with my child.

In addition to the nine people killed, many were injured. Human Rights Watch researchers spoke to a forty-three-year-old man who had serious gunshot wounds on the side of his head. He was shot outside his house in Dilimi on September 9, at about 4 p.m. He said: "Three people attacked me. They had local guns; I still have the bullets. There were other people around but I was the only one they caught there. They didn't say anything. They just shot me. I spent thirteen days in hospital."²⁹

Attacks on Muslims in Other Areas

Human Rights Watch researchers also spoke to Muslims from other parts of Jos who had suffered or witnessed acts of violence.

A forty-year-old Muslim man from Watam, in Riyom local government area, survived with serious injuries after watching several of his neighbors being killed:³⁰

Christians were rounding up Muslims in my area. It happened on Monday, September 10, at about 2.30 p.m. They killed eight people there. They asked us all to lie down outside a shop and poured petrol over us. I started running, but eight other men were killed. They were hit with machetes first, then burnt. I managed to drag one of them with me but he died later in hospital.

As I was running away, they came after me and hit me with their machetes on the back of my neck, on my elbow and back. There were

²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 6, 2001.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview in Shifa Hospital, Jos, October 1, 2001, translated from Hausa.

about 200 of them, some young, some old, including a retired army officer. I recognized some of them. They are my Birom neighbors. We knew each other before. They attacked us just like that. I don't know what they were saying as I don't understand their language.

I stayed in the bush for four days before coming to hospital. I was hiding in the bush with my friend Adama Mohammed, the one who died in hospital. They had chopped off his hands and cut his face. I was trying to help him while we were hiding in the bush. I think he bled to death.

The others who were killed all died on the spot. They included Ya'u Zakary, Alhaji Adamu Isa, Mohammed Ammani, Iliya Abdu, and Mohammed Sani, a police officer. They were all my neighbors.

Alhaji Zakaria Haruna, a former civil servant from Dadinkowa, was killed on September 8; his body was burnt and dumped in the boot of his car. He was stopped and surrounded by Christian youths as he was driving into town. The youths were arguing among themselves, some saying they should kill him, others saying they should let him go. As he tried to start up his car again, a cassette of Islamic preaching was inadvertently switched on in his car. Hearing this, the youths began attacking him with machetes and setting fire to him. They left him in the boot of his car. Initially, relatives had difficulty finding his vehicle as the number plate had been removed. Eventually, a relative located it and found the burnt and shriveled body in the boot.³¹

Some of the victims were not even residents of Jos or Plateau State. For example, five Hausa men who were just passing through Jos on their way to Bauchi and Gombe states were attacked on September 8 at the bridge opposite the permanent site of the university. Only one survived by hiding under the bridge. He saw his brother fall off the bridge after being attacked with machetes. The attackers said: "He's alive!

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 1, 2001.

Let's follow him!" He tried to help his brother who had fallen but had to abandon him when the attackers caught up. They killed his brother with cutlasses.³²

³² Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 2001.

VI. Attacks on Christians

Violence in Angwan Rogo

The predominantly Muslim area of Angwan Rogo near the University of Jos was the scene of some of the worst violence against Christians. When Human Rights Watch visited the area in October, there appeared to be very few Christians still living there; those who had survived fled the area as soon as they could on September 7 or 8. A school principal from Angwan Rogo told Human Rights Watch:³³

Christians can't live in Angwan Rogo now. I can't go back to live there. All Christians have vacated. In Angwan Rogo there is a place where "Sharia line" has been written on the tar on the road. It was written during the crisis. When we hear the government saying it's safe and we can go back, we just laugh.

He himself had narrowly escaped being killed:

On Friday, I tried to make my way home but I couldn't get through [...] Looking towards Angwan Rogo, all I could see was fire, including the church which was on fire. [...] Along the road I met a group of armed people. In the park, they said: "See, there's one of them!" I reached a primary school and there was another hostile group. They said: "Catch him!" They fired a gun into the air. Further on, I met another group of about thirty, mostly young boys; they were hiding guns under their clothes. They also had bows and arrows, knives, and cutlasses. I heard an announcement on the mosque loudspeaker, saying: "Finish these people off if you catch any of them."

The man eventually sought protection in the university grounds. His four children, who were trapped in Angwan Rogo on the first day of the violence, were saved by a Muslim neighbor.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 4, 2001.

A twenty-seven-year-old Christian woman from Angwan Rogo, who, along with her family of eight, was still living in a displaced people's camp one month later, witnessed some of the violence on the first two days as she was trying to flee:³⁴

The violence reached Angwan Rogo on Friday, September 7. We tried to leave but we couldn't pass. That night I was at home. About sixteen Hausa men came to the house. They were carrying knives, cutlasses and axes. We could identify about seven of them as our neighbors. They came into our compound but fortunately they couldn't penetrate into the house. We had turned the lights out and we saw them cutting down trees; they were saying they were cutting down the trees of the enemy. Later they burned and vandalized our house, after we left. Some of our neighbors were not so lucky. The Hausa men got into their houses and killed people, then threw their corpses into their house.

Early the next day, we tried to leave again but the place was still being attacked. On that Saturday, September 8, some of my neighbors were killed, including Mr. Okoye, an Igbo man who worked at the university. They left his corpse in front of his house. Another family was also attacked that day: they were indigenes, Biroms. They killed the father and three sons in the house. They asked the mother and daughters to leave, then burned down the house.

Eventually the military came and helped us get out.³⁵ Some Christians tried to get out on their own; they were killed by Muslims. Some Hausa elders pleaded for Christians not to be harmed and they helped call the army to get us out. Along the road, other Muslims said to the soldiers that they should allow them to kill Christians; the soldiers told us not to listen to them and that we would be safe.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 3, 2001.

³⁵ The army was called in and intervened in some areas on September 8.

I saw people being killed. I also passed a lot of corpses in the street and people who had been burnt in their houses. The corpses were mainly men, and a few women. People were using cutlasses, axes and guns. It was very prepared and planned. They were heavily armed. They were picking Christians out, whether indigenes or not. As I was leaving I tried to count the bodies, but I couldn't, I felt so bad. It was like a film. I just know there were lots of corpses.

As we were heading towards the university campus, some Hausas came with us. Some Christian indigenes accused them of being spies and caught them. They killed two of the Hausa with big sticks; they hit them on the head and they collapsed. Then they poured petrol over them and put tires around their heads and burned them.

There are no Christians left in Angwan Rogo. Even before this crisis, there were tensions. We were threatened by Muslims, even children who were repeating what their parents said. These were not words of peace. They were encouraging people to fight.

Human Rights Watch researchers spoke to a thirty-eight-year-old Christian man who had just been discharged from hospital after sustaining serious injuries near Angwan Rogo on September 8:³⁶

On Saturday morning, at about 8 a.m. or 9 a.m., I was on my way to my house in Angwan Rimi to collect money for my mother's funeral. When I reached the junction at Angwan Rogo, a group of men stopped me and asked me where I was going. I told them. They started abusing me and asked me what my religion was. I said: "I am a Christian." I can't deny my religion even if I'm dying. They were very aggressive. There were many of them, about 300; they covered the whole of the main road. They were men of different ages. They had guns, rods, and machetes. There was a leader commanding them. He was urging them

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 3, 2001

on. He told them that if they died in the process, they would go to heaven. They hit me on the head with a series of machete strikes and with an iron rod on both arms. They tried to break my ribs with the rod but I protected my ribs with my arms, so my arms were hit instead. I was also hit on the ankle and the back. With the rush of blood to my head, I fainted. They thought I was dead. They carried me and threw me through the university fence.

Some students found me and took care of me. They started treating my head injuries at the university but they couldn't finish the stitches so they had to take me to hospital. I was hospitalized for three weeks and four days. I was only discharged today. I have nothing. They took 55,000 naira (the money for my mother's burial) and all my belongings.

I was alone at the time of the attack. My family was at home. I don't know where they are now. I heard they've gone to the village far away in the south, in Umuahia. They don't even know that I'm alive.

Attacks at the University of Jos

The violence in Angwan Rogo spilled over into the university compound on September 7 and 8. Students and university staff were killed, some at the university, others in or near their homes: due to a shortage of accommodation on the campus, as many as 20 percent of students live in Angwan Rogo. Most of the violence against students appeared to be carried out by Muslims from Angwan Rogo. It was not always clear whether Christian students were targeted specifically because they were Christians, or simply because of the university's proximity to Angwan Rogo, and because many people who were fleeing violence in their own areas had sought refuge in the university grounds. Students got caught up in the conflict as they attempted to defend the university compound. The areas around the university gates turned into some of the fiercest battlegrounds.

A student leader described the scene:³⁷

On Friday, Muslims were attacking Christians in Angwan Rogo and we were caught in the middle. We heard reports that some students had been attacked. Students in the campus were wondering what to do and where to go. We had no weapons, so there was no point looking for the attackers. We just decided to stay together. There were more than sixty or eighty people who had sought refuge in the university. A mob of aggressors followed them to the gates. We had to position ourselves in strategic locations by the different gates. We had to defend ourselves from 2 p.m. till 11 p.m. Most of the students and staff were trapped. We couldn't go out because there was fighting in town. We spent the whole night at the university. The next day, we thought everything was OK. The deputy governor had come to reassure us. We started leaving on Saturday but had to return almost immediately.

The attackers had bows and arrows, machetes and locally-made guns. Some people were shot; I saw many injuries. We resisted the attack but we only had stones. There was attack and retreat, backwards and forwards, several times. They almost subdued us. They burned the gate of the permanent site.

Another student described the chaos at the university:³⁸

The crisis started on September 7. Information first reached us at 2:20 p.m. We rushed down to the Bauchi Road campus. There was pandemonium there. We were not sure what to do. A female student was coming from town, oblivious to what was going on. Near Angwan Rogo junction, a group of people attacked her with a knife, chopped off her ear and tried to make her to chew it. Someone intervened to save her.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, University of Jos, October 3, 2001.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, University of Jos, October 3, 2001.

We gathered at the university gate and saw boys marching forward for an attack. We threw stones in their direction and they retreated. They were near the Bauchi Road car park. We received information that they were preparing to invade the hostel. We tried to protect ourselves but we had nothing. We were told that some students who had been macheted and shot were at the university clinic. Medical staff had run away for safety. Some students were able to hijack vehicles to convey wounded students to the hospital. I was doing this myself until 2:30 a.m. There were roadblocks along the way. We took more than twenty-five students and other Angwan Rogo residents to the hospital. The first student died at the hospital; he was macheted all over his face. Another died of liver perforation; a bullet had also entered his lungs. People had been hit with bullets, machetes, local arrows. Houses were burnt, bodies were also burnt. Men, women and children. It was a pathetic sight. This had never happened before.

At least twenty-five students and at least six or seven university staff, including two lecturers, are believed to have died. A student leader told Human Rights Watch:³⁹

We are still verifying the number of students we lost. On September 8 Allanana Anthony Atta Ebuga, a fifth year pharmacy student, was burnt in his room in Angwan Rogo; he was sleeping when his house was set ablaze. The previous day, four girls were burnt inside a room. Lots of property was looted or stolen, including students' books and their credentials. Many students who lived in Angwan Rogo have been displaced; they have nowhere to live. Exams were supposed to be held on October 15; they will have to be postponed. Studies have been completely disrupted.

Many people who had run to the university grounds for protection but who were not students or university staff witnessed attacks against students around the university area. One man who fled there on September 7 said:

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, University of Jos, October 3, 2001.

They killed a student in my presence. They shot him and he fell down. They cut him up with machetes then put a tire around him and burned him. It was at 9:00 a.m.; I saw it with my own eyes. It was at the place where they sell vehicles. They shot many students there. [...] I witnessed killings at the motorpark on Friday. I saw this from the university. People were carrying guns. One group sent another group in front. They were firing at people as they went. They were stopping vehicles, getting Christians out and burning the vehicles. I must have seen about thirty-two dead.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 4, 2001.

VII. The Role of the Security Forces

Christians and Muslims alike—community leaders as well as ordinary residents of Jos—all deplored the conspicuous absence of the security forces in the early days of the crisis. On the basis of information collected in Jos, Human Rights Watch shares their belief that some of the violence could have been prevented or at least contained had the police intervened earlier. Quite apart from the question of whether the violence could have been foreseen and therefore preempted by security force action on the basis of the warning signs described above, many questions are raised by the absence and apparent ineffectiveness of the police to restore law and order once the violence started on September 7, as well as by the fact that it was only the intervention of the military from September 8 which eventually put a stop to the fighting. Ironically, in a country that has suffered so long at the hands of the Nigerian army under successive military dictatorships, many residents of Jos seemed to welcome the arrival of soldiers in their town as the only hope of restoring peace. A 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. curfew, which the government imposed from the evening of September 7, was largely ignored and had little impact on halting the spread of violence. The police appeared unable to enforce it; it was only toward the end of the crisis that the military began patrolling at night.

The commissioner of police of Plateau State, Mohammed Abubakar, was strongly criticized for his failure to prevent or stop the crisis, by nongovernmental organizations and others.⁴¹ Some Christian groups alleged that he had selectively protected certain sectors of the population and not others. Human Rights Watch was not able to substantiate these allegations, which the commissioner of police has denied. Nevertheless, the commissioner of police clearly had a responsibility firstly to take seriously and respond to signs of increasing tension in the weeks leading up to September 7, and secondly to instruct the police force to intervene to the best of its ability to ensure the security and protection of the population once the fighting

⁴¹ See, for example, press release by the League of Human Rights, “An avoidable battle for the Soul of Jos,” September 20, 2001: “The Plateau State Commissioner of Police Alhaji Mohammed D. Abubakar has a lot of questions to answer not only from the thousands of people who have lost their loved ones but from the blood of those who have needlessly lost their lives [...]”.

Mohammed Abubakar was transferred to Abia State in November 2001. Several other commissioners of police were also given new postings.

had begun. A local human rights activist told Human Rights Watch: “The police commissioner kept saying everything was under control while the whole town was on fire.”⁴²

Despite numerous attempts to contact the commissioner of police, he was unavailable to meet Human Rights Watch researchers during their visit to Jos, and we were told by a staff member in his office that no one else could talk to us in his place. However, on the basis of information available from local human rights organizations and other sources, we can conclude that the police did not deploy sufficient efforts to either prevent or limit the violence. For example, it is not clear why police based at a station less than one kilometer away from the mosque at Congo Junction where the violence began failed to come to the scene once they were alerted; they reportedly stated that they had not received instructions to intervene. The absence of the police was also noticeable at the University of Jos, where the fighting was particularly fierce. One student said: “The police never came to the university at all. Only the military came. They appeared on Friday at about 11 p.m. They were just patrolling. At one point the military even left during an attack.” Another student said: “We lost total confidence in the police. They were not here. Until today, they are not here.”⁴³ The vice-chancellor of the university first called the police for help on the afternoon of September 7; he could not get a reply for more than half an hour. He then called the Central Intelligence Bureau and asked to speak urgently with the commissioner of police. He was told the commissioner was not there and there was nobody in the office. He resorted to calling the military who eventually arrived at the university at about 11:00 p.m. that night.⁴⁴

Witnesses also commented that in the few cases where police were present, they were ineffective, inadequately equipped, unarmed or outnumbered by rioters. In Pankshin, on the outskirts of Jos, some residents fleeing the violence took refuge in the police station, but there were no police there. In another case, near Angwan Rogo, on September 7, a Hausa man tried to save a Christian indigene by taking him to the police for protection. The police said they could not do anything and told him to go to

⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with the Civil Liberties Organisation, Jos, October 1, 2001.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with students at the University of Jos, October 3, 2001.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Vice-Chancellor Professor Monday Y. Manguwat, University of Jos, October 4, 2001.

the university. On the way there, they reached a roadblock, where a group of armed Muslims killed the Christian, despite the Hausa man's efforts to save him.⁴⁵

Members of the security forces—particularly the police—were also responsible for human rights violations themselves during the crisis, including shootings and ill-treatment, even though they are not known to have participated in widespread killings and destruction alongside armed civilians. However, there were numerous reports of “fake soldiers” among the mobs, civilians dressed in army uniform, making it difficult at times to make a clear distinction.

Arrests, Ill-treatment, and Extrajudicial Executions

According to official statements, around three hundred people were arrested by police or the military in connection with the crisis; some were subsequently released. However, local residents who witnessed people being arrested and taken away by police or soldiers claimed that many more than three hundred were arrested. A number were arrested for minor offences, such as breaking the curfew. There were scores of apparently arbitrary arrests, including of many teenagers. Meanwhile, those believed to have been responsible for organizing the violence remain at large.

When Human Rights Watch researchers visited Jos Prison on October 2, there were 171 detainees arrested in connection with the crisis being held there: 151 Muslims and twenty Christians. At least twenty-six of them were under eighteen; some were children as young as ten or eleven years old. The deputy controller of Jos Prison explained that when the minors were first brought to the prison, he refused to accept them, but they were brought back again the following day. His request that they be moved to a remand center was not met. The children were facing various charges, including unlawful assembly, inciting disturbance, rioting, and culpable homicide.

Human Rights Watch interviewed several of the children, who seemed not to know or understand why they had been arrested. One of them, aged about ten, told us: “On the Friday, I went to prayer. The police caught me as I was coming back from the

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Jos, October 2001.

mosque on my way home. They didn't say anything to me. I don't know why I am here."⁴⁶

A thirteen-year-old boy was arrested on Wednesday September 12:⁴⁷

I was inside the mosque at Yanshanu. There was a peaceful atmosphere. After the 4 p.m. prayer, the congregation had just finished, when soldiers came into the mosque. There were about seven soldiers carrying guns. They arrested us. They lifted the mats to check for weapons but there was nothing there. They made us lie down outside. Seventeen of us were taken outside, including me and my younger brother, and some adults. They beat us and kicked us with their boots. I was kicked on my face, above the eye, and on my shoulder. My brother was also beaten very hard. We stayed there less than an hour then we were taken to the police office. They didn't ask us any questions and didn't give us any information. We spent about fifteen days in the police cell. All seventeen of us were held together. Many other people were also held there. Then we were taken to Kabong Upper Area Court. In the court our names were called and they announced that we had been burning houses. We were not directly asked any questions. We are all accused of burning houses but there weren't any houses being burnt around the mosque. We had no chance to say anything. Then we were brought here to the prison. I don't know how long I will stay here.

A fourteen-year-old boy was also beaten, this time by police:⁴⁸

I was arrested on Sunday, September 9, at Nasarawa Yanshanu, in the street, near my house. I was sitting there with my two brothers; my younger brother is thirteen and my older brother no more than sixteen.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos Prison, October 2, 2001.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos Prison, October 2, 2001, translated from Hausa.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos Prison, October 2, 2001, translated from Hausa.

The curfew starts at 4 p.m. At about 4.30 p.m., about five policemen came and arrested all three of us. They were carrying guns. They beat us with their belts and one beat us with the butt of his gun. I was beaten on my back and knee; it is still painful even though I have received treatment in the clinic. The police just said we had exceeded the curfew. They took us to the police station. After eleven days we were taken to the state police, then to Kabong court. They didn't ask us anything there. They brought us to the prison. First the prison rejected us so we were taken back to the police station, then brought back here the next day.

A seventeen-year-old boy was arrested in the area of Anglojos on the morning of Saturday, September 8, with his fifteen-year-old brother as they were returning from visiting their aunt.⁴⁹

We met some airforce men. They asked us to stop and searched us. They didn't find anything. They beat us with their guns, belts, and boots and made us lie down and crawl in the dirty water. They asked my brother to give them money. I was hit with a belt on my chest and my brother was beaten on the shoulder with a gun butt. They were about to let us go when a police vehicle arrived. The policemen said they wanted to take us away. They said to us: "Are you not aware of what is going on?" They took us to the state CID, me, my brother, and five other boys, some as young as fourteen. We were kept outside then called in to take our statements. The police asked us: "Where were you? Did they catch you with weapons?" We said no. They wrote this down then put us in a cell. We stayed there for eleven days. They brought us out on Monday when the governor came. They separated those who had been caught with weapons. The governor said those without weapons should be released on bail, and for those with weapons, the police knows what to do.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos Prison, October 2, 2001.

The next day, we were taken to court. They said we had been shouting “Allahu Akbar” (God is great) and calling people to follow and fight, that we burned churches and mosques and killed people. There were about twenty-five of us, some Christians, some Muslims. I am a Christian. We tried to deny the charges but we were not allowed to explain. One man tried to talk but was told not to. There was no burning or killing in the area where I was arrested.

There were also reports of police shooting people who were not armed or engaged in any criminal acts. For example, three men who were sitting outside their house on September 9 were shot at by a policeman. Human Rights Watch interviewed two of them who had been injured, one of whom was still in hospital with gunshot wounds. The other, a driver who still bore scars from the shooting, explained how they were taken by surprise:⁵⁰

We were sitting in front of my house in New Market Street. About six policemen came past in a vehicle, at about 5.30 p.m. The vehicle passed us and we waved to the police. Then a man in the back of the vehicle shot at us as the vehicle went past. The shots hit two of the three of us. One of my friends is still in hospital. He was shot in the lower back and buttocks. I was shot on the side, on the hip and in the chest. The person who shot at us was in police uniform. The car had an official police vehicle number which we noted [...] The man only aimed at the three of us. He didn't shoot anybody else.

Then another police vehicle came by. Some military told the police what had happened but they didn't chase the first vehicle.

One of the most serious human rights violations by the security forces was the likely extrajudicial execution of twenty-two detainees at Jos Prison. During the night of September 9-10, twenty-four detainees broke out of their cell and attempted to escape from the prison; twenty-two of them were shot dead or fatally injured, while

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 1, 2001, translated from Hausa.

the other two managed to escape. All those who died had been arrested on armed robbery charges; they had been detained for various periods—three of them for as long as eight years and one for seven years—awaiting trial.⁵¹

Human Rights Watch spoke to several detainees who had shared their cell, as well as with the deputy controller of the prison. It would appear that the detainees were shot outside the prison. At least some of them did not die instantly and were still alive when they were brought back into the prison. From the information gathered, it is likely that some of them could have been saved had emergency medical treatment been made available. Several hours elapsed before they were all pronounced dead the following morning. It has not yet been independently confirmed whether the detainees were shot by police, by prison warders or by a combination of both.⁵²

⁵¹ The twenty-two detainees who died are Abubakar Musa, Samuel Jemam, Sani Habu, Aliyu Akpada, Okema Chime, Alade Joseph, Michael Uba, Ibrahim Ayo, Lawrence Asaego Udoh, Ikechukwu Omarah, Chukuma Stephen, Christian Obieke, Adamu Abdullahi, Hassan Baya, Lawrence Oyedoku, Ismaila Abdullahi, Nantok Peter, Iliya Bitrus, Nura Ahmed, Pam Moses, Attang Yusu and Emmanuel Nwaogu.

⁵² Human Rights Watch interviews, Jos Prison, October 2, 2001.

VIII. Impact of the Jos Crisis on Other Areas

Given the spread and movement of people across Nigeria, the crisis in Jos had a direct impact in other parts of the country. As with other conflicts, for example, when the February 2000 riots in Kaduna led to reprisal killings in the southeast, the consequences of the violence in Jos were felt as far away as the southeast and some northern cities.

In the town of Onitsha in the southeastern Anambra state (an area predominantly inhabited by Igbos, with a small minority of Hausas), some Igbo civilians began attacking Hausas indiscriminately, after Igbos fleeing the violence in Jos returned to Onitsha and brought back the bodies of Igbos killed in Jos. A journalist and human rights activist who was present in Onitsha said vehicles were burnt, and mobs with sticks, knives and iron rods tried to lynch people. Some Igbo people were shouting and crying, saying that the killing of their relatives in Jos had to be avenged. At least seven Hausas were killed by Igbos in retaliation for the killing of Igbos by Hausas in Jos. The victims were Hausas who happened to be driving past in their vehicles; Igbos reportedly flagged down the vehicles, pulled out the passengers and killed them. A representative of the Hausa community reported that earlier the same day, some Igbo youths had come into the Hausa-dominated market at Bridgehead, in Onitsha, and started abusing them, protesting about killings of Igbos by Hausas in Jos; several Hausa people were injured in the argument that ensued. The police encouraged Hausas to relocate to the army barracks and offered them protection later, but by mid-October, no one was known to have been arrested.⁵³

Violence sparked off by news of killings of Igbos in Jos was also reported in several other southeastern states in September. In Akwa Ibom, in Uyo state, four Hausas were reportedly killed and several others injured, apparently in revenge for killings of Igbos in Jos.⁵⁴

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview, Enugu, October 8, 2001.

Also see "Blood for blood", *The News* magazine (Lagos), October 1, 2001, and "Aftermath of Jos Riot, 5 killed in Onitsha," *This Day* (Lagos), September 17, 2001.

⁵⁴ See "Blood for blood", *The News* magazine, October 1, 2001.

Tension was also heightened in the northern city of Kano, where Muslim youths protested and attacked a church on September 10; however, it was unclear whether these riots were directly connected with the crisis in Jos.

IX. The Response of the Government

Response to the Violence of September 2001

The governor of Plateau State, Joshua Dariye, came under fierce criticism for inaction and negligence before and during the crisis. In particular, he was criticized for traveling abroad just one week before the crisis, at a time when tensions had already risen to a dangerous level.⁵⁵ A local human rights activist told Human Rights Watch: “When the governor returned half way through the crisis, he just tried to order people to get on with their normal activities [....] The government has been pushing the problem under the carpet. They have played down the violence including the number of victims. They reacted after the fact and mismanaged the situation.”⁵⁶

As with the police, Human Rights Watch made repeated attempts to meet the governor but was told that he was not available. From the available information, it would appear that the state government, too, neglected to take action that could have prevented or limited the crisis. On the basis of the evidence described above, particularly the threats contained in correspondence addressed to the governor himself and other material circulated in the days leading up to the violence, it is difficult to believe that the state government was not aware of the dangerous build-up of tension. The government also appeared to ignore several calls of alarm from local human rights organizations⁵⁷ who personally visited the office of the deputy governor, the commissioner of police and the director of the SSS, including on September 7, the day the violence started. When they asked why the security forces had not seen the warning signs, they were told that the warnings had been communicated to the authorities; yet no action was taken. For example, the government did not make any concerted effort to work with community leaders to pacify the situation and appeal to their members to refrain from violence; nor did it

⁵⁵ See for example press release by the League for Human Rights, “An avoidable battle for the Soul of Jos,” September 20, 2001.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Civil Liberties Organisation, Jos, October 1, 2001.

⁵⁷ Civil Liberties Organisation, Community Action for Popular Participation and the Christian Foundation for Social Justice and Equity.

make any attempt to question the authors or signatories of the threats issued in the days leading up to the violence.

At the federal level, the government was anxious to play down the scale of the violence. Government officials were reluctant to issue an estimated death toll, even after the extent of the killings had become widely reported. Eventually the state-run *Daily Times* newspaper, on September 12, was quoted in various media reports as stating that 500 bodies had been buried.⁵⁸

On September 15, President Obasanjo visited Jos and condemned the violence. Soon afterwards, the government set up a peace and reconciliation committee, composed of Muslim and Christian leaders and officials from the Plateau state government. The committee, whose mandate was to pacify and calm the population, toured the city talking to different communities. It concluded its work in the first week of October. However, according to a member of the state government's Information Committee (which was also set up by the government as part of its response to the crisis), the peace and reconciliation committee's report would not be made public and was merely intended to "guide the government."⁵⁹

Several other committees and commissions of inquiry were set up at different levels. A judicial commission of inquiry was announced by the federal government on September 25; chaired by Justice Suleiman Galadima, a Federal High Court judge from Nasarawa State, its main focus is to investigate the circumstances in which the twenty-two detainees who had tried to escape died at Jos prison. There is some lack of clarity in its terms of reference as to whether or to what extent it is also mandated to investigate other aspects of the crisis in Jos. A separate commission of inquiry, chaired by Justice Niki Tobi, was set up at the level of the Plateau State Government, to investigate the broader crisis. Both the federal and the state commissions have begun receiving memoranda and holding public hearings in Jos. In addition, an executive committee of the federal Senate, chaired by former Senate President Senator Chuba Okadigbo, is carrying out its own investigation, but this will have a

⁵⁸ See for example Reuters, "Nigeria moves to halt spread of religious killings," September 13, 2001, and BBC News "Toll of Nigerian ethnic clashes hits 500," September 13, 2001.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Jos, October 5, 2001.

broader remit and will study the crisis in Jos alongside conflicts in other parts of the country; members of the committee have toured Plateau, Benue and Nasarawa states and are expected to submit a report to the Senate on their findings.

Human Rights Watch and representatives of local human rights organizations met a representative of the Plateau state Information Committee. We asked him for information about the government's initiatives in response to the crisis, in particular details of the various commissions of inquiry. The representative gave very little information, despite explaining that one of the main purposes of the committee was to make official information available to the public; its other purpose was to collect information on the response of communities and communicate these to the government. He claimed not to have information on the number of victims of the violence, nor on the number of arrests. Instead, he referred us to the chairman of his committee, who is also the Information Commissioner for the Plateau state government. A meeting that he claimed to have arranged with the chairman of the committee did not materialize.⁶⁰

On the humanitarian level, government authorities, with the assistance of nongovernmental organizations such as the Nigerian Red Cross, eventually provided protection and assistance for those fleeing the violence. In the first week there were initially around 50,000 displaced persons, in eight different camps, most of them located in military barracks and police buildings.⁶¹ By early October, they had been transferred to just two sites, a primary school at Gangare and the Federal School of Forestry. By the end of November, there were still many displaced people scattered around Jos, some unable to return to their homes because they had been destroyed, others too fearful of returning because of perceived insecurity.

Responses to the Causes of the Conflict

Various theories have been advanced to explain the unprecedented explosion of violence in Jos in September 2001. The most plausible combine a number of political and economic factors. Patterns over previous years indicate that the main rivalries

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Dele Oke, Jos, October 5, 2001.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with the Nigerian Red Cross, Jos, October 3, 2001.

lay not so much in religious tensions but in a long and sometimes bitter struggle for political control between “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” inhabitants. This competition dates back to the colonial era, when “indigenous” groups were already frustrated with what they saw as the colonial administrators’ support for the Hausa rulers. In terms of the historical discourse, both the “indigenes” and the Hausas have claimed “ownership” of Jos, with the “indigenes” basing their claim on the fact that their presence in the area predated that of the Hausas, and the Hausas stating that they founded the city of Jos. Several decades later, the “indigenes” still claim that the settlers have come in and taken over economic activities, while the “settlers” complain of marginalization and of being treated as second-class citizens.

In terms of access to resources and opportunities in day-to-day life, the distinction between “indigenes” and “non-indigenes” is critical. In practice, the two groups effectively have different rights, resulting in discrimination and inequalities of access in many areas. The impact has been felt particularly in education and employment, where an informal two-tier system appears to operate. For example, “non-indigenes” have to pay higher fees to enter good public schools, while paying the same taxes as “indigenes.” “Non-indigenes” complain of discrimination and harassment in their search for employment, especially in the civil service and in federal institutions: many senior positions are seen as effectively “reserved” for “indigenes” and some “non-indigenes” have been repeatedly threatened, apparently in a bid to make them resign or to discourage them from seeking further promotion.⁶²

Religious differences have also always been present, but were not originally the main cause of the tension in Jos. What started as a political conflict ended up as an outwardly religious feud: religion was increasingly used and manipulated to deepen divisions, creating a situation where one of the first reactions of the rioters in September 2001 was to attack mosques and churches as the most tangible symbols of “enemy values.” A professor at the University of Jos explained: “Religion was simply an excuse. It is not the main issue, but it played a role in widening the conflict. It was a tool of manipulation. People are more emotional in situations of poverty and religion is used to inflame passions. People respond quickly when something is

⁶² Human Rights Watch interviews in Jos, October 2001.

presented as a religious issue.”⁶³ This manipulation of the religious factor sometimes led to changing alliances: for example during the September 2001 crisis, some Muslim “indigenes” (a minority) were assimilated to Hausas and targeted by Christian “indigenes.” In the words of one Muslim leader, “some other tribes which became Muslims are regarded as Hausas, even though they are not. Hausa has become synonymous with Islam.”⁶⁴

In the wake of the Jos crisis and the spiraling conflicts in other parts of the country—notably in Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states—the federal government eventually set up initiatives in the latter part of 2001 to try to address the broader phenomenon of inter-communal violence in Nigeria. A national commission on security was created; meetings were convened with the governors of the affected states, including Plateau State; and in November the government announced the constitution of a judicial commission of inquiry into the inter-communal conflicts in Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states. At the time of writing it is too early to judge what impact these initiatives will have on the communities concerned. President Obasanjo has also repeatedly called for calm and condemned the violence in public statements, but to date few practical steps have been taken toward prevention.

Many Nigerians characterize the government’s attitude towards inter-communal violence as passive at best. To date, it has done little to address the longstanding grievances of the various communities concerned, nor has it attempted to find a solution to the problems caused by the notion of “indigeneity” which is at the root of many of these conflicts. Certainly, the September 2001 conflict in Jos can be attributed directly to competition and bitterness over perceived advantages and disadvantages between “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” populations, as illustrated above.

Fundamental flaws in Nigeria’s constitution have still not been addressed, despite many appeals from civil society groups and others who have pointed out that by reforming the constitution, or at least by instituting a process for consultation to engage different communities in its review, the government could go some way

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr Sam Egwu, University of Jos, October 5, 2001.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, October 1, 2001.

toward putting a stop to inter-communal violence. The legitimacy of the current constitution is hotly disputed, not least because it was drafted without consultation with the Nigerian people, under a military government.

In recognition of the multi-ethnic character of Nigeria,⁶⁵ the 1979 constitution (which forms the basis for the 1999 constitution currently in force) introduced the concept of “federal character.” The federal character provision was intended to give all Nigerians a sense of stake in the government, as well as a sense of belonging and representation. It was also intended to redress the consequences of certain imbalances: for example, in the past southerners were more likely to be represented in government as they generally had better access to education than northerners. The 1999 constitution provides for political positions to be allocated according to a quota system. It states: “The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.”⁶⁶ However, it leaves open the question of who is considered to be “from” a particular state. Likewise, the constitution does not include a definition of “indigeneity,” yet uses the term “indigene.”⁶⁷ At the same time, it guarantees freedom from discrimination on the basis of membership of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion.⁶⁸

The absence of a clear, official definition of “indigeneity” has caused many problems. In practice, the concept of “indigeneity” or of being “from a state” has been applied and interpreted in inconsistent ways in different parts of Nigeria, often not reflecting the theory or the spirit of the constitution. In some states, claims to “indigeneity” have been used to give specific groups certain rights based not on their Nigerian

⁶⁵ Nigeria has more than 300 different ethnic groups.

⁶⁶ Section 14(3), Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

⁶⁷ See for example section 147 (3), Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999: “[...] the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of such State.”

⁶⁸ See section 42, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

citizenship but on their ancestors' place of origin within Nigeria. Some political groups have taken advantage of the vagueness surrounding the definitions to marginalize other groups, leading to further grievances.

A professor at the University of Jos explained: "You are only a full citizen of Nigeria if you live in your area of origin. The notion of indigeneity conflicts with the democratic or republican concept of citizenship. However long you live somewhere, you can't become an indigene of that place unless your parents are indigenes. It is easier to become a Nigerian citizen than an indigene."⁶⁹

The Citizens' Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR), a group set up by a number of Nigerian human rights and other nongovernmental organizations, has stated: "People have argued that the elite manipulate the concept of indigeneity for selfish ends. There has therefore been a strong argument for establishing citizenship based on residency. There have been various suggestions on how this issue should be addressed. Meanwhile, the problem of indigeneity has caused a lot of problems in Nigeria. Following the creation of new states, people were asked to leave the state where they have been working for years because they are non-indigenes [...] Women who are married to men from another state suffer worse dilemma, as they can neither lay claim to the state of their parents nor that of their husbands. Children born to non-indigenes face discrimination in admissions into schools or in payment of higher amount of money in school fees. There is therefore the need for provisions on citizenship that is all inclusive and foster national unity and integration."⁷⁰

The government set up a presidential committee to review the constitution, which produced a report in February 2001. However, both politicians and civil society groups have strongly criticized its composition and its work as unrepresentative. The House of Representatives is also undertaking a review of the constitution, to which nongovernmental organizations, including the CFCR, have made submissions and proposals. Meanwhile, the real and perceived divisions between "indigenes" and "non-indigenes" continue to fuel tensions across the country.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr Etannibi E.O. Alemika, Department of Sociology, University of Jos, October 6, 2001.

⁷⁰ "The Position of the Citizens' Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) on the Review of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," 2001.

The Nigerian Government has an international obligation to provide equal protection to all citizens before the law and to prohibit any form of discrimination. In particular, article 2.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states: “Each State Party to the present Convention undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origins, property, birth or other status.” Article 26 of the ICCPR states: “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” While the Nigerian constitution does prohibit discrimination, the government has a responsibility to ensure that protection from discrimination and equal rights for all are applied in practice. By failing to ensure that the provisions of the constitution are applied consistently by state authorities throughout the country, the Nigerian government is failing to meet its international obligations.

X. Conclusion

The five days of bloodshed in September 2001 have left the inhabitants of Jos in a state of shock. A woman interviewed by Human Rights Watch said: “This madness started here on Friday, then on Tuesday we heard about the attacks in the United States and saw it on the television. We thought the world was coming to an end.” Since September, Jos has been calm but the memories of the violence are still fresh and kept alive by the continuing fighting between communities in several neighboring states.

After interviewing many Christians and Muslims in and around Jos, Human Rights Watch concluded that both communities suffered massive human and material losses during the crisis but could not assert that one side could be held responsible for a significantly greater number of abuses than the other. Nor were we able to substantiate the more dramatic claims made by some Muslim groups that the crisis had been engineered by Christians in a bid to wipe them out, or vice-versa.⁷¹ Unfortunately, the crisis served to reinforce these extreme positions among some members of both communities, resulting in serious accusations being traded backwards and forwards and often biased reporting of events in the media and in other documents. Nevertheless, it was clear to Human Rights Watch that the majority of inhabitants of Jos, whether Christian or Muslim, were less interested in this propaganda than in restoring peace and normality and resuming harmonious relationships with their neighbors.

One of the many sad consequences of the violence in Jos is that in addition to the hundreds of lives needlessly lost, seeds of distrust have been sown between communities. For the first time, people are eyeing each other not only with suspicion and jealousy, but also with fear. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the violence, messages of peace from community leaders in Angwan Rogo, who tried to reassure students that they would not be attacked if they returned to their homes in

⁷¹ For example, in a letter responding to the Plateau State governor’s speech of September 25, entitled “Reply to the Governor Dariye’s diatribes against Muslims”, the Jos North Local Government Branch of Jama’atul Nasril Islam wrote: “It is becoming clearer that Muslims have been singled out for total annihilation.”

the area, were mistrusted or dismissed.⁷² It will take some time to undo this damage and to restore confidence. However, there have also been many testimonies to the courage and integrity of both Christians and Muslims who saved others from the onslaught of members of their own faith during the crisis. There were also examples of successful appeals by religious and other community leaders to calm people down and prevent them from engaging in pointless destruction. In areas such as Dadinkowa (a majority Christian area), concerted efforts and cooperation by Christian and Muslim leaders succeeded in averting more widespread violence.⁷³ Since the crisis, a number of nongovernmental organizations have also tried to overcome the polarization caused by the crisis and bring communities back together.

It is now the primary responsibility of the authorities to ensure that such a crisis can never occur again. In the immediate future, the two commissions of inquiry offer an opportunity for both the state and federal governments to demonstrate their commitment to restoring enduring peace in Jos. However, the commissions must be more than a token exercise to appease government critics. They must make every effort to establish the truth regarding the events of September 2001 and their causes and make this information public. At the same time, police and judicial authorities should investigate events leading up to and during the crisis in Jos and ensure the prosecution of those found responsible for the violence. While impunity continues to protect those who organized and perpetrated these abuses, the chances of violence recurring remain high. The authorities should also work closely with local communities to try to restore trust between different ethnic and religious groups in Jos and rebuild the social fabric that was temporarily destroyed in September.

Most importantly, if serious attempts are to be made to avoid further inter-communal violence in Jos and elsewhere, the government must address the roots of the problem, in particular the grievances that have been created by the concept of “indigeneity.” It should embark without delay on legal and constitutional reforms

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview in Angwan Rogo, October 3, 2001. See statement by Angwan Rogo community leader, September 29, 2001: “[...] I Teacher Usman Ibrahim duly nominated by the community wish to express the stand of the community regarding the relationship existing between it and the University of Jos community, particularly the students, whom we have been staying together for many years. We are ever ready to stay together and interact as we used to do. I am also on behalf of the entire community of Angwan Rogo dispelling the rumors that the community wouldn’t want to see any students of the University of Jos in the area [...]”

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Muslim and Christian leaders from Dadinkowa, Jos, October 2001.

that will end discrimination in practice and guarantee equal rights and protection to those currently labeled “indigenes” and “non-indigenes.” These reforms and their practical implementation are urgent. The period leading up to elections in 2003 will be especially tense. Unless grievances are addressed in good time, competition for political positions is likely to lead to a renewal of violence in Jos and in other parts of Nigeria. There is a clear and urgent need for the government to initiate a democratic and legitimate process to resolve this and other constitutional issues, with the full involvement of all communities.

XI. Acknowledgements

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