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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

IDP crisis in Nigeria

The ongoing violence in the Northeastern part of Nigeria has displaced about 2.4 million persons in the region, recently declared the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). An estimated 7.1 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian aid. Some 80 % of IDP households live in extreme poverty. Many of them are lacking education, proper sanitation or access to fresh water.

The recent flare up in violence across Northwestern Nigeria has sharpened the IDP crisis in Northern Nigeria and the refugee situation in neighboring countries. Recently published figures by UNHCR are alarming: In April 2020, some 23,000 people have been forced to flee from their villages in Northwestern Nigeria. The displacement crisis in the region worsens due to escalating violence. Some 37,000 people, mainly women and children, have fled the area in 2019. Now the figures of internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees are even more alarming, because violence between herders and peasants, bandits, criminal gangs, radical Islamists and vigilantes is escalating. In one of the deadliest incidents in the last months, some 47 persons have been killed during an attack by gunmen in Kankara town (Katsina State) in May 2020. A few weeks before, on April 1, 2020, some 22 villagers were killed in Gangara (Sokoto State) in an armed attack. In a brutal incident in Makyali (Kaduna State), seven people were murdered on May 13, 2020. Only a day before, five persons were killed in attacks on the villages of Bakin-Kogi and Idanu (Kaduna State). The same day, May 12, four persons were murdered by herdsmen in Tse-Haaga (Benue State). These are only a few examples of dozens of attacks against civilians.

The violence is widespread in seven states in Northwestern Nigeria (Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Niger, Kebbi, Zamfara). After the escalation of violence in Northeastern Nigeria by the terror group Boko Haram has led hundreds of thousands of peasants and villagers to abandon their houses and to search for protection in nearby cities, now it is the turn of the civilian population in the Northwestern part of the country to fear brutal attacks.

Very often the crisis is described as a brutal campaign by Muslim Fulani herdsmen to take over land of mostly Christian farmers. Christians in Northwestern Nigeria are fearing a brutal genocidal campaign of devastation and arbitrary murder to force the peasants to leave their homes and abandon their land. They are feeling helpless as religious minority people in mostly Muslim Northern Nigeria and without meaningful protection by state security forces. The figures of victims are shocking: In the first five months of the year 2020, some 2,771 people were killed due to political violence. It is alarming that 754 persons died in March and 625 people in April. And the violence goes on. Most of the victims were unarmed civilians, many of them Christians. Churches and mosques were destroyed, houses and shops burned down.

There is a long history of herder- and peasant-conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Limited resources of grazing land and water, climate change and increasing herds are creating more and more tensions between both groups eager to ensure the control of resources as a guarantee for survival. Poverty, marginalization and negligence by state authorities are inciting tensions and conflicts. The peasants are trying to defend their livelihood by armed vigilantes who are increasing the risk of arbitrary abuse of weapons and armed conflict.

It's an extremely complicated situation, which has led to an IDP crisis with more than 210,000 people who have fled their homes in Northwestern Nigeria. Their living conditions are appalling due to insecurity and limited access of aid agencies. Many humanitarian organizations have been concentrating on activities in devastated Northeastern Nigeria after years of civil war and brutal fighting between the army and Boko Haram. The biggest toll has to be paid by children. They are lacking education and security; thousands became orphans due to the violence.

There is a massive lack of state authority in the crisis region. For years villagers are complaining that security is not ensured. Police officers, judges and soldiers are lacking to guarantee the respect of law and constitution. For too much time the federal and state governments have ignored or downplayed the conflict. Even today, the federal government fails to provide massive humanitarian support and to develop recovery programs to ensure that the victims of violence or marginalization are getting sufficient support. To curb impunity the authorities must strengthen the presence of the security and judicial sector in the region and improve the protection of all communities. Encouraging dialogue in the area will be a helpless effort, if both sides will not agree to disarm and to build up trust and mutual understanding. But dialogue between armed aggressors and civilians makes no sense. Therefore, security is a pre-condition to stabilize the region and for an effective mediation in local conflicts. The state authorities must ensure a better protection of its civilian population in order to ease tensions between different ethnic and religious groups.

Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to:

- ensure an effective protection of its civilian population, enabling IDPs to return to their villages, disarm armed herders and vigilantes,
 - strengthen the presence of police officers, judges and soldiers in the conflict areas in the Northwest of the country,
 - ensure a better protection of IDPs and avoid overpopulation of crowded IDP camps, end impunity of violence against civilians.
 - end impunity for attacks against IDPs.
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