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A row of caskets have flowers placed on them. They are surrounded by people in various chu

Flowers lie on caskets during a funeral Mass in the the parish hall of St. Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Nigeria, June 17, 2022. The Mass was for some of the 40 victims killed in a June 5 attack by gunmen during Mass at the church. 52,250 people have been killed over the last 14 years in Nigeria only for being Christians, a new report published April 10 revealed (OSV News photo/Temilade Adelaja, Reuters)



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At least 52,250 people have been killed over the last 14 years in Nigeria just for being Christian, a new report published April 10 revealed.

The report, titled "Martyred Christians in Nigeria" and published by the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety), which is headquartered in Eastern Nigeria, says 30,250 of those have been killed since 2015, when President Muhhamadu Buhari came to power. The report blames what it calls Buhari's radical Islamism for those killings. Approximately 34,000 moderate Muslims were also butchered or hacked to death within the same period.

At this point, 2023 is not looking any better, with the report revealing that 1,041 "defenseless Christians" were slaughtered in the first 100 days -- that is from Jan. 1 to April 10. Within the same period, at least 707 Christians were kidnapped.

The report further indicates that under Buhari, 18,000 Christian Churches and 2,200 Christian schools were incinerated.

The attacks on Christians have also led to significant problems with regard to people being forced to flee from their homes. While more than 50 million Christians, mostly in Northern Nigeria, face "serious jihadist threats for being professed Christians," no fewer than "14 million have been uprooted and 8 million forced to flee their homes to avoid being hacked to death," the report says.

About "5 million have been displaced and forced into Internally Displaced Peoples' (IDP) camps within Nigeria and refugee camps at regional and sub-regional borders."

The sheer number of Christians and moderate Muslims killed or displaced has sent chills down the spines of many, including Andrew Boyd, spokesman for Release International, which serves the persecuted church in some 30 countries. He described the report's finding as "a staggering death toll."

"It is absolutely appalling that so many Christians are being targeted for their faith and killed in Nigeria, while the Nigerian government seems to stand by and let it happen. It is no less appalling that the international community appears content to stay on the sidelines and watch," he told OSV News.

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Meanwhile, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), in its own report, has given voice to the thousands of Christians persecuted for their faith in Nigeria.

Maryamu Joseph was just 7 years old when Boko Haram, a violent jihadi extremist organization, attacked her Bazza community and forcefully took her and 21 others to the Sambisa Forest, where she spent nine years. She only escaped in July 2022, and she told her story to ACN.

"Nine years of living in bondage! Nine years of torture! Nine years of agony! We suffered so much at the hands of these heartless, ruthless people," she told ACN. "For nine years, we saw the shedding of the innocent blood of my fellow Christians, killed by people who do not value life. They murdered without remorse, like it's a normal thing to do. These nine wasted years in the Sambisa Forest cannot be forgotten in a blink of an eye. Words cannot do justice to what I've gone through."

Andrew Boyd said his organization has identified Nigeria as "a country of particular concern." But the figures of those being killed in the tens of thousands, and the disheartening testimonies of survivors like Maryamu Joseph, "cry out more clearly than we ever could," Boyd said. He said the statistics were no doubt appalling, but they weren't surprising.

"Release International has been reporting year in and year out of the targeting of Christians in Nigeria by Islamist militants. Not only do Nigeria's Christians face slaughter at the hands of Boko Haram and Islamic State, they are being killed daily by well-armed Fulani extremists," Boyd told OSV News, referring to Fulani pastoralist people who have joined Islamist extremist groups.

He warned that there could be "a mass exodus of Christians from Africa's most populous country unless the incoming Nigerian president takes urgent steps to protect Christians from the violence of these jihadists."

He said his organization was working with partners on the ground in Nigeria "to provide support for suffering Christians." This includes trauma counseling. "So many have lost members of their families and their homes. We are working with trusted partners to bring some comfort and support. We are raising their voices and their concerns around the world. And we will continue to do so," Boyd stressed.

According to the Open Doors Watch List 2023, released on Jan. 17, Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places "to follow Jesus." According to the report, Nigeria accounts for 89% of Christians martyred worldwide.