

# Executive Summary

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## A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

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2010a). The Middle Belt region, to which Plateau State belongs, is one of the areas worst hit. The 2001 Jos riot claimed at least 1,000 lives in Jos (HRW, 2001). Subsequently, long-standing tensions within smaller towns and villages in Plateau State violently escalated. The killings only came to a halt when the federal government declared a state of emergency in 2004, after about 700 people had been killed in an attack on the town of Yelwa in southern Plateau State (HRW, 2005). Clashes between Muslim and Christian youths rocked the city of Jos again in 2008, killing at least 700. The year 2010 has been one of the worst on record, with more than 1,000 lives lost.<sup>1</sup>

The human cost of the violence is immense. The number of internally displaced people since 2001 peaked in 2004, with up to 220,000 people

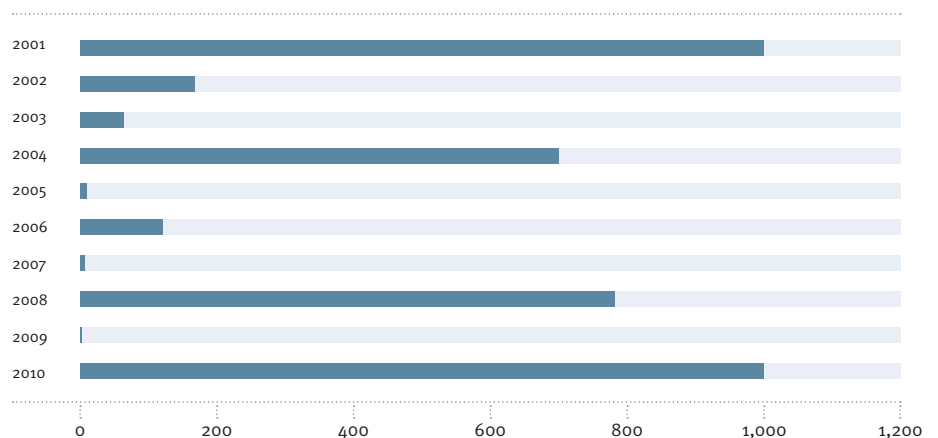
displaced (IRIN, 2005). After the 2008 riot, more than 10,000 were displaced, while violence in 2010 resulted in about 18,000 people fleeing the clashes (IRIN, 2010). Numerous houses in Jos have been burned and blackened remnants litter the streets in many parts of the city. All sides suffer a massive loss due to livelihoods destroyed. Violence and displacement have reshaped Jos and many rural settlements. As neighbourhoods become religiously segregated, 'no-go areas' alter patterns of residency, business, transportation, and trade.

This report examines the root causes of conflict in Jos and its transformation into a wider ethno-religious protracted conflict. It maps the spatial spread of violence that reshaped the face of the city. The first part outlines the historical background and socio-economic charac-

Over the last decade, the political crisis over 'indigene' rights and political representation in Jos, capital of Plateau State, has developed into a protracted communal conflict affecting most parts of the state. At least 4,000 and possibly as many as 7,000 people have been killed since late 2001, when the first major riot broke out in Jos in more than three decades (see Figure 1). Ten years later, only the heavy presence of military and police forces ensures a fragile calm in the city. Tensions between ethnic groups rooted in allocation of resources, electoral competition, fears of religious domination, and contested land rights have amalgamated into an explosive mix. The presence of well-organized armed groups in rural areas, the proliferation of weapons, and the sharp rise in gun fatalities within Jos all point to the real risk of future large-scale violence.

More than 13,500 people have been killed in communal violence since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999 (HRW,

FIGURE 1 Conservative estimates of casualties in Plateau State, 2001–10



NOTE:

Data is drawn from information and unpublished memoranda received from local communities in Jos; from the ACLED database for Nigeria (ACLED, n.d.); from research on the LexisNexis newspaper database; and from Human Rights Watch reports and press releases (2001; 2005; 2006; 2008; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011). Victim numbers for rural attacks may have been under-reported in local and international newspapers. Other sources list higher estimates; Higazi (2011) calculates a total death toll of at least 7,000 people for the last decade, with an estimated 5,000 people killed in 2001–04 and another 2,000 in 2008–10.

teristics to Plateau State. The second part analyses the root and proximate causes of the conflict and documents perceptions among the local population about the current situation. The analysis then focuses on the violent episodes and investigates the characteristics of urban and rural violence. In its final section, the report provides an overview of violence prevention and peacebuilding efforts pursued by the Plateau State government, civil society actors, and international donors over the last decade.

The report is based on field research carried out in Jos in November and December 2010. The author conducted more than 60 interviews with local residents, community and religious leaders, local NGO staff, journalists, university researchers, ward heads, and local politicians. Interviews with local residents were mostly held in the worst-affected poor neighbourhoods of Jos city. Two focus group discussions were held on community violence prevention strategies. The author visited youth outreach peace activities, such as a high school peace club and a group discussion subsequent to an interfaith soccer match. Discussions were also held with several residents who were active in local community peace activities. In addition to a literature review, the report draws on newspaper reporting of violent incidents and peacemaking efforts over the last decade.<sup>2</sup> All interview respondents have been cited anonymously.

This study finds that the historical, regional, and religious dimensions of the Jos crisis are crucial for understanding the protracted nature of the current conflict situation. Geographically, Jos lies in the centre of Nigeria, between the predominantly Muslim north and the mostly Christian south. The city of Jos was established around tin mining activities during colonial times. It attracted migrants from all parts of Nigeria for work in the mines and with the colonial administration. The colonial legacy of indirect rule initially relied on northern emirate structures. Later, political power was transferred to the 'native' tribes of the Plateau. Among these, the Berom were one of the largest tribes and most vocally defend 'indigene' rights today. But Hausa migrants from the north constituted by far the most numerous group in early Jos.

Today, the ownership of Jos and claims to 'indigene' status are fiercely contested

between the native tribes and the Hausa. Indigene certificates ensure access to political representation and positions within the civil service. Only local governments issue these certificates and therefore decide over indigene status. This arrangement opened the floodgates for the politics of labelling and the selective reciting of historical accounts that foster group boundaries to secure political control over local government areas. Within a socio-political environment characterized by strong patronage networks, exclusion of one fraction of the political elite is widely felt as socio-economic decline among its constituency. The urban conflict dynamics interlink with tensions in rural areas. The increasing scarcity of land and access to riverbanks has resulted in contested claims over land use between indigene farmers and Fulani herders.

Religion reinforces the boundaries between the mostly Christian indigenes and the Muslim Hausa and Fulani in both urban and rural conflicts. In principle, these root causes of conflict are well understood. Nigerian scholars have elaborated the problem of indigene rights in several publications. Yet there has been a lack of political will to address the situation. The subsequent escalation of large-scale urban and rural violence over the last decade contributed to the

#### Box 1 Nigeria's citizenship crisis

*In principle, all Nigerian citizens are equal no matter the circumstances of their birth and whether or not they reside in their places of origin. But in practice, one is a Nigerian citizen only in his state of origin [...] no matter for how long one resides or domiciles in a state other than his own (Ojukwu and Onifade, 2010, p. 176).*

The conflict over citizenship and indigene rights is in no way peculiar to Plateau State. Most states of the Nigerian federation face an indigene or citizenship crisis. The constitution privileges local descent over residency. Those who leave their state of origin risk becoming 'second-class citizens' in another part of the federation. Within a country of more than 250 ethnic groups, the discrimination against non-indigenes in all six geopolitical zones threatens to tear the country apart. Indigene status is an important tool in the politics of identity and labelling. Differing interpretations of local history are applied to mark the boundaries of who belongs and who is left out.<sup>3</sup>

protracted conflict. A thorough reframing of a once-localized conflict over indigene rights into a religious crisis of regional and national dimension has taken place. Ten years of violent confrontations and the utmost brutality of last year's massacres around Jos left many residents traumatized. Religious identities have become strongly polarized and one-sided conflict narratives internalized.

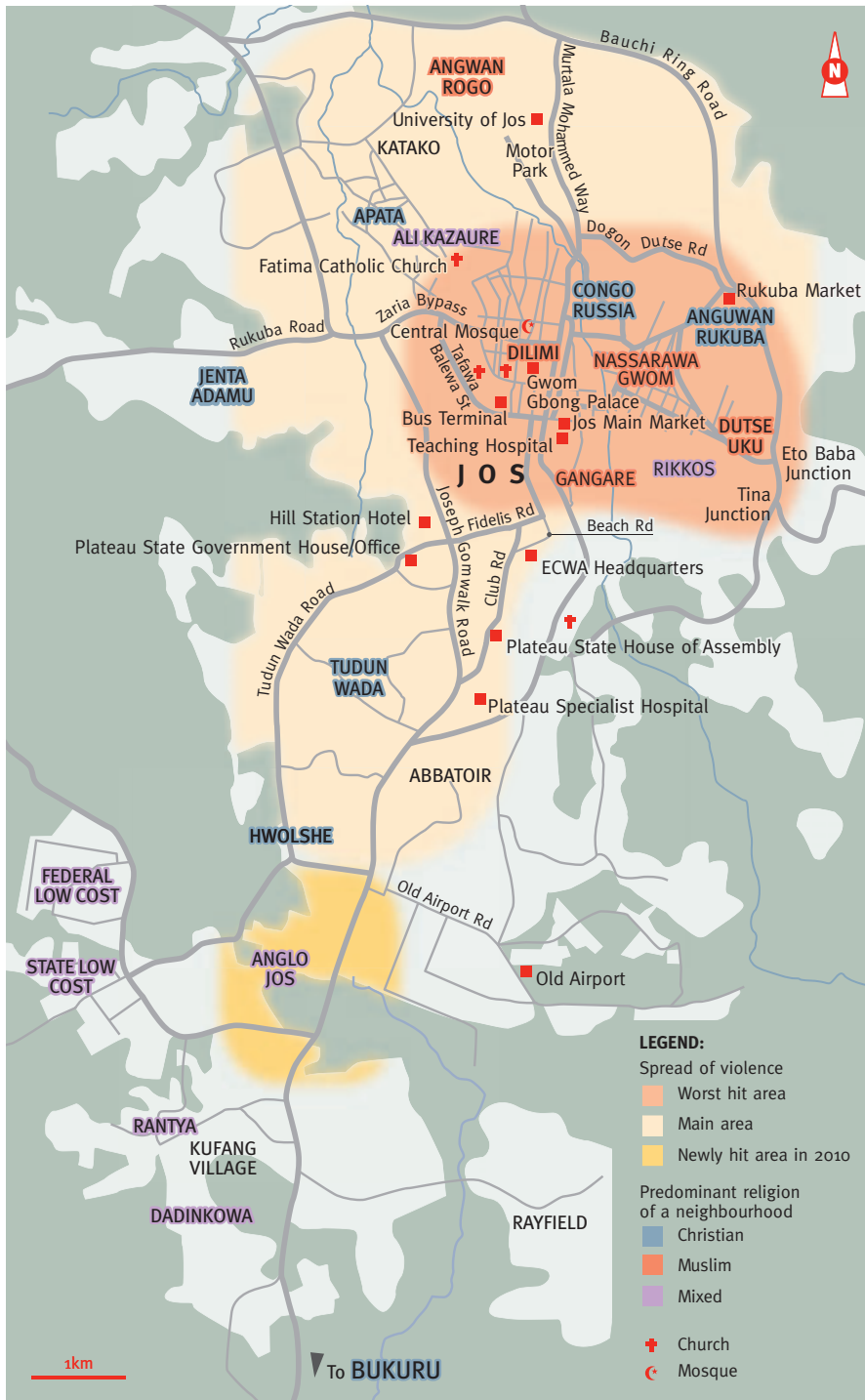
When you see your family slaughtered, much of the religious values become irrelevant. You cannot be peaceful anymore.<sup>4</sup>

Despite a host of peace efforts on all levels of society, the situation in Plateau State has only worsened. The main political actors in the perpetuated crisis have been on the scene over the last decade. The lack of political will to resolve the crisis has long been lamented. Just after the 2001 riots, the Christian leader of Plateau State's Inter-Religious Committee urged political leaders and elders to 'bury their differences' and cooperate for the common good of all communities, specifically naming former governor Joshua Dariye and current governor Jonah Jang among others (AllAfrica, 2002).

Trading in illegal arms is endemic all over Nigeria. Since the crisis, illegal weapons have also proliferated within the city of Jos and all over Plateau State. In addition, a significant number of weapons are manufactured locally. Local communities blame each other for acquiring weapons and preparing for the next attack. Arms are not only financed and supplied by ethnic and religious militias, politicians, wealthy individuals, or traditional rulers, but also by local communities via religious groups or cultural and development organizations.<sup>5</sup> The sharp rise in gun fatalities in the 2008 and 2010 Jos riots testifies to the alarming number of illegal arms in circulation. Despite numerous peace efforts, the situation on the Plateau is at its worst today.

Compounding the tragedy of the Jos crisis, violent clashes are no longer only sparked by deliberate political instigation during election times. In fact, Plateau State remained calm during the April 2011 national and gubernatorial elections, while neighbouring Kaduna, Bauchi and other northern states were rocked by violent protests. But in Jos, small-scale reprisal and revenge killings have exploded since 2010. The situation is so tense that residents fear any minor incident can set the town ablaze again.

MAP 1 Jos: the spread of violence



A long-term solution to the Jos and wider Plateau State crisis will need to tackle the indigene–settler divide. However, given that the conflict over indigene rights is endemic all over Nigeria, Plateau State will hardly arrive at a durable solution on its own. Christian indigenes need only point to the discrimination against fellow Christians in northern, predominantly Muslim states to justify exclusion of Hausa–Fulanis in Jos. The latter constitute Nigeria’s most numerous ethnic group. Plateau’s indigenes feel threatened with marginalization and are not willing to be the first to step down from exclusive indigene privileges.

Religious leaders will have to take responsibility for deconstructing the perceptions of existential threat to religious identity that have become entrenched in many people’s daily lives. Top-level religious leaders have preached peace and tolerance, but the message does not fully trickle down. While grassroots initiatives echo their tenor, mid-level religious leaders feel under pressure to protect their communities. People tend to be suspicious of inter-religious dialogue. It is difficult to rebuild trust among communities. Many within the churches and mosques call for a more militant response from their community. Now that Jos has man-

**Box 2** Dadin Kowa: the peaceful community

The community of Dadin Kowa—located in Jos South Local Government Area—has remained peaceful to date. Several mixed communities surround the settlement; some have seen sporadic killings (such as Rayfield) and violent clashes (such as Anglo Jos). The majority of Dadin Kowa’s population is Christian, although there is a significant Muslim minority. The population is mixed in terms of economic and social status, with large houses on the outskirts and crammed streets of poor settlements in its centre.

Women played a major role in keeping peace in the community. After the devastating 2008 crisis, more than 200 women came together with support from Damietta Peace Initiative (DPI) to voice their fears regarding potential future violence. They met and discussed issues and everyday challenges against the background of the ongoing crisis. Many Christian families had fled to Dadin Kowa from violence-affected areas. Women had lost their husbands and children, their houses, and their businesses. They brought with them their grief as well as stories of atrocities and loss. The influx of displaced persons increased tensions. Many women worried that their community could soon also be affected by violence. After the gathering, the women regularly met in several smaller groups to address problems and establish dialogue with each other. The women’s groups largely managed their regular meetings on their own after several of them had received short-term training from DPI.

When violence broke out again in January 2010, these women went to their religious leaders and pleaded with them to forbid any violence and to undertake measures of violence prevention. Pastors and imams met together with several elders and agreed on a ‘peace declaration’ that was read out to the community. Elders organized local youth into mixed vigilante groups to guard the settlement against outside attackers. A local pastor pleaded with youth groups from neighbouring settlements who came to attack Muslims in Dadin Kowa and averted violence.

Although peaceful to date, Dadin Kowa remains volatile. Some of the women could not face each other for weeks and months after the Kuru Karama and Dogo Nahauwa massacres. Everyday tensions are evident. For example, both sides hold grievances over loudspeakers during prayer times of the mosques and churches. A Christian pastor admitted that Muslim residents had sent soldiers to ask the church not to use its loudspeakers during Muslim early morning prayers. The pastor had refused on the ground that the same early morning time would represent a core Christian prayer time and could not be violated.

aged to stay calm during the 2011 elections, political elites in Jos and Abuja will need to tackle the Jos crisis. A heavy military presence is no durable solution.

The report is divided into the following sections:

### I. Historical Background and Socio-Economic Characteristics

Spatial and demographic characteristics

Historical background

Social and economic characteristics

### II. Root and Proximate Causes to Violent Conflicts

Competing historical interpretations and political claims

The creation of Jos North LGA

Citizenship and indigene rights

Rural land conflicts

The regional dimension of the Jos crisis

The religious dimension

### III. Violent Events in Jos city and Plateau State rural areas

The 2001 crisis

The 2002–04 killings and the state of emergency

The 2008 crisis

The 2010 crisis

### IV. Violence Prevention and Peacebuilding Efforts

Early warning

Security forces

The 2002 peace summit

The 2004 peace conference

Civil society efforts

Inter-religious dialogue

Community initiatives

Reports of the commissions of inquiry

*This Executive Summary is based on a forthcoming Working Paper from the Geneva Declaration.*

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## Endnotes

- 1 These figures are based on victim numbers reported by local communities that are discussed in the report. Human Rights Watch (2008 and 2011) also estimates at least 700 victims in 2008 and at least 1,000 victims in 2010.
- 2 This analysis is based on the ACLED dataset, which covers violent events in Nigeria from 1997 until 2010. This database was completed and extended by the author for Plateau State with research on the LexisNexis newspaper database search. See also ACLED (n.d.).
- 3 This section is based on Golwa and Ojiji (2008). See also HRW (2006).
- 4 Author interview with a local resident in Jos, November 2010.
- 5 The information in this paragraph is based on Blench (2004) and on author interviews.

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## The Geneva Declaration

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, endorsed by more than 100 countries, commits signatories to supporting initiatives intended to measure the human, social, and economic costs of armed violence, to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of armed violence reduction programmes, and to disseminate knowledge of best practices. The Declaration calls upon states to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and tangible improvements in human security by 2015. Core group members include Brazil, Colombia, Finland, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. Affiliated organizations include the Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUONO).

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