



Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence

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Principal Findings

What's new? Violence between Nigerian herders and farmers has escalated, killing more than 1,300 people since January 2018. The conflict has evolved from spontaneous reactions to provocations and now to deadlier planned attacks, particularly in Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states.

Why did it happen? Three factors have aggravated this decades-long conflict arising from environmental degradation in the far north and encroachment upon grazing grounds in the Middle Belt: militia attacks; the poor government response to distress calls and failure to punish past perpetrators; and new laws banning open grazing in Benue and Taraba states.

Why does it matter? The farmer-herder conflict has become Nigeria's gravest security challenge, now claiming far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency. It has displaced hundreds of thousands and sharpened ethnic, regional and religious polarisation. It threatens to become even deadlier and could affect forthcoming elections and undermine national stability.

What should be done? The federal government should better protect both herders and farmers, prosecute attackers, and carry out its National Livestock Transformation Plan. State governments should roll out open grazing bans in phases. Communal leaders should curb inflammatory rhetoric and encourage compromise. International partners should advocate for accountability and support livestock sector reform.

Executive Summary

In the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 Nigerians have died in violence involving herders and farmers. What were once spontaneous attacks have become premeditated scorched-earth campaigns in which marauders often take villages by surprise at night. Now claiming about six times more civilian lives than the Boko Haram insurgency, the conflict poses a grave threat to the country's stability and unity, and it could affect the 2019 general elections. The federal government has taken welcome but insufficient steps to halt the killings. Its immediate priorities should be to deploy more security units to vulnerable areas; prosecute perpetrators of violence; disarm ethnic militias and local vigilantes; and begin executing long-term plans for comprehensive livestock sector reform. The Benue state government should freeze enforcement of its law banning open grazing, review that law's provisions and encourage a phased transition to ranching.

The conflict is fundamentally a land-use contest between farmers and herders across the country's Middle Belt. It has taken on dangerous religious and ethnic dimensions, however, because most of the herders are from the traditionally nomadic and Muslim Fulani who make up about 90 per cent of Nigeria's pastoralists, while most of the farmers are Christians of various ethnicities. Since the violence escalated in January 2018, an estimated 300,000 people have fled their homes. Large-scale displacement and insecurity in parts of Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states hinder farming as well as herding and drive up food prices. The violence exacts a heavy burden on the military, police and other security services, distracting them from other important missions, such as countering the Boko Haram insurgency.

The conflict's roots lie in climate-induced degradation of pasture and increasing violence in the country's far north, which have forced herders south; the expansion of farms and settlements that swallow up grazing reserves and block traditional migration routes; and the damage to farmers' crops wrought by herders' indiscriminate grazing. But three immediate factors explain the 2018 escalation. First is the rapid growth of ethnic militias, such as those of the Bachama and Fulani in Adamawa state, bearing illegally acquired weapons. Second is the failure of the federal government to prosecute past perpetrators or heed early warnings of impending attacks. Third is the introduction in November 2017 of anti-grazing laws vehemently opposed by herders in Benue and Taraba states, and the resultant exodus of herders and cattle, largely into neighbouring Nasarawa and, to a lesser degree, Adamawa, sparking clashes with farmers in those states.

As the killings persist, Nigerians are weaving destructive conspiracy theories to explain the conflict. Charges and counter-charges fly of ethnic cleansing and even genocide – by both farmers and herders. In Benue state, once part of Nigeria's northern region, herders' attacks have deepened anger, particularly but not only among farmers, at the Fulani who are spread across the north. Widespread disenchantment with President Muhammadu Buhari – who is viewed outside the north as soft on the herders – could hurt his, and the ruling party's, chances in the February 2019 elections.

The federal government has taken measures to stop the bloodshed. It has deployed additional police and army units, and launched two military operations to curb violence in six states – Exercise Cat Race, which ran from 15 February to 31 March, and subsequently Operation Whirl Stroke, which is still ongoing. Even with these deployments, however, killings continue. President Buhari and other senior officials have consulted with herder and farmer leaders, as well as relevant state governments, to discuss ways to halt the attacks. As a long-term solution, the government has proposed establishing “cattle colonies”, which would set aside land for herders across the country, and more recently unveiled a National Livestock Transformation Plan (2018-2027). These measures signal greater commitment on the government's part, but they are yet to be implemented and the violence continues.

President Buhari's administration needs to do more. Crisis Group's September 2017 report, which analysed the roots of the conflict, laid out detailed recommendations for resolving it. These remain largely valid. This report focuses on immediate priorities – tasks the federal and state authorities, as well as community leaders and Nigeria's international partners, must urgently undertake to stop the escalation spinning out of control. In this light, the Nigerian government should:

- ❑ **Bolster security for farmers and herders:** The federal government should deploy more police in affected areas; ensure they are better equipped; improve local ties to gather better intelligence; and respond speedily to early warnings and distress calls. In addition, it should begin to disarm armed groups, including ethnic militias and vigilantes in the affected states, and closely watch land borders to curb the inflow of firearms.
- ❑ **End impunity:** The federal government also should order the investigation of all recent major incidents of farmer-herder violence. It may need to expedite the trials of individuals or organisations found to have participated, sponsored or been complicit in violence.
- ❑ **Elaborate the new National Livestock Transformation Plan and commence implementation:** The federal government should publicise details of its National Livestock Transformation Plan, encourage buy-in by herders and state governments, and move quickly to put the plan into effect in consenting states.
- ❑ **Freeze enforcement of and reform state anti-grazing legislation:** The Benue state government should freeze enforcement of its law banning open grazing, as Taraba state has already done, and amend objectionable provisions therein. It should also help herders become ranchers, including by developing pilot or demonstration ranches, and conducting education programs for herders uneasy about making the transition.
- ❑ **Encourage herder-farmer dialogues and support local peace initiatives:** Federal and state governments should foster dialogue between herders and farmers, by strengthening mechanisms already existing at state and local levels, and particularly by supporting peace initiatives at the local level.

For their part, herder leaders, many of whom recognise that pastoralists will have to move, even if gradually, toward ranching, should exercise restraint. They should challenge legislation they dislike in court; urge members, in the meantime, to abide by laws and court decisions; and encourage herders to take opportunities to move from open grazing to ranching. All communal leaders – religious, regional and ethnic – should denounce violence unequivocally and step up support for local dialogue. Nigeria's international partners should nudge Buhari to act more swiftly to end the killings. Human rights groups should speak out more loudly against atrocities. Aid organisations should devote resources to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states, with special attention to women and children, who constitute the majority of the displaced. International development agencies should work with Nigerian authorities to offer technical support for livestock sector reform.

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Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence

I. Introduction

The conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria, centred in the Middle Belt but spreading southward, has escalated sharply.¹ Since September 2017, at least 1,500 people have been killed, over 1,300 of them from January to June 2018, roughly six times the number of civilians killed by Boko Haram over the same period.² The first half of 2018 has seen more than 100 incidents of violence and more fatalities than any previous six-month period since the conflict started worsening in 2014. The surge of violence is concentrated in Plateau, Benue and Nasarawa states in the North Central geopolitical zone and in the adjoining Adamawa and Taraba states in the North East zone.³

Plateau state, which had been relatively peaceful for about two years, has witnessed renewed confrontations, with herders and farmers trading blame as to who triggered the resurgence. One report claims that at least 75 people were killed, some 13,726 displaced and 489 houses burned down, largely in Bassa local government

¹ For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°252, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*, 19 September 2017. The Middle Belt is a loosely defined area between the Muslim and Hausa-dominated north and the predominantly Christian Igbo and Yoruba areas of the south, broadly comprising Niger, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states. Many of the region's numerous ethnic groups share a history of resistance to the Sokoto caliphate, which ruled much of it from 1804 to 1903. Aliyu A. Idrees and Yakubu A. Ochefu, *Studies in the History of the Central Nigeria Area*, vol. 1 (Lagos, 2002).

² Exact figures of the Boko Haram toll are not available, but on 18 June 2018, the United Nations humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria, Myrta Kaulard, reported civilian casualties from the insurgents' attacks since the beginning of the year at "over 200". "UN humanitarian coordinator a.i. in Nigeria condemns deadly suicide attacks in Damboa, North-East Nigeria", press statement, United Nations, Abuja, 18 June 2018.

³ Nigeria is officially divided into six geopolitical zones, created during the regime of General Sani Abacha in 1996, which are the basis for sharing federal political offices, public sector appointments and economic development projects. These are the North Central (comprising Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states); North East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states); North West (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states); South East (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states); South West (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo states); and South South (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers states). The North Central zone is sometimes also referred to as the Middle Belt. States are administered by powerful governors and divided into local government areas, each under an elected council. Kaduna and Zamfara states also suffered many incidents of deadly violence between January and June 2018, but these fit more under the rubrics of long-running indigene-settler and ethno-religious disputes in the former, and rising rural banditry in the latter, than strictly in the herder-farmer category.

area, from 8 September to 17 October 2017.⁴ The violence continued into 2018: since January, over 300 people have been killed in attacks on villages in Bassa, Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, Riyom, Mangu and Jos South local government areas.⁵ The deadliest sequence of events was the 23-24 June attack on eleven villages in Barkin Ladi and subsequent reprisals on a highway, which altogether killed more than 200 people.⁶

In Benue state, tension rose sharply after 1 November 2017, when a state government law against open grazing – thus prohibiting herders' longstanding practice of letting their livestock forage unrestrained – took effect. From 1 to 7 January, armed men widely believed to be herders angered by the law raided six farming villages across Logo and Guma local government areas, killing over 80 people.⁷ The attacks have continued with over 300 more killed in the state since then.⁸ Logo and Guma, largely populated by farmers of the Tiv ethnic group, suffered the highest death tolls. As these areas abut Nasarawa and Taraba states, locals say attackers usually strike across the boundaries and retreat.⁹

Nasarawa state has also suffered an increase in violence involving both herders and farmer militias. From January to June 2018, over 260 people were killed in several incidents, mostly in the southern zone covering Doma, Awe, Obi and Keana local government areas.¹⁰ Most of these killings followed the influx of herders driven there by the Benue state anti-grazing law.

North-eastern Adamawa state has seen recurrent clashes between Fulani herders and farmers from the Bachama ethnic group.¹¹ Tensions rose sharply after 20 Novem-

⁴ "Herdsman attacks: '75 killed, 13,726 displaced in Plateau'", *The Punch*, 27 October 2018. The Irigwe are a small ethnic group (about 70,000) living in Bassa and Barkin Ladi local government areas of Plateau state and Saminaka local government area of Kaduna state.

⁵ Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Nigeria entries, January-April 2018. For major incidents, see "Again, gunmen attack Plateau, kill 11 youths", *New Telegraph*, 9 November 2017; "11 confirmed killed in fresh Plateau attack", *The Guardian* (Lagos), 10 March 2018; "Again, herdsman kill 25, raze houses in Plateau", *New Telegraph*, 14 March 2018.

⁶ The Nigeria police spokesman initially reported 86 "corpses recovered", but various local sources reported significantly higher numbers, including the state governor who said the toll was about 200. A fact-finding mission by the Christian aid and advocacy group, Stefanos Foundation, which visited the affected communities, reported 233 killed. "Police: 86 persons killed in Plateau", *The Nation*, 24 June 2018; "Plateau imposes curfew as Fulani herdsman attack 11 villages", *Punch*, 24 June 2018; "Plateau attacks: IDP figure hits 11,515, death toll 233 – report", *The Punch*, 9 July 2018.

⁷ Ayilamo, Gaambe-Tiev and Turan villages were attacked on the morning of 1 January, and Umenger, Tse-Akor and Tomatar on 2 January. Crisis Group interviews, displaced persons at IDP camps in Benue state, 16-18 January 2018.

⁸ Some sources report higher death tolls. For example, on 7 June, the chairman of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Benue state said over 500 indigenes were killed from January to that date. "Hold defence minister responsible for Wednesday's killings – Benue", *The Punch*, 8 June 2018.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, displaced persons at IDP camps, civil society leader and senior government official in Benue state, 16-18 January 2018.

¹⁰ Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Nigeria entries, November 2017-April 2018. For some of the major incidents, see also "17 killed in Nasarawa, govt moves against perpetrators", *The Guardian*, 5 January 2018; and "Nasarawa: Herdsman kill seven in midnight raid", *New Telegraph*, 31 January 2018.

¹¹ The Bachama, also known as Bwatiyes, are one of more than 70 ethnic groups in Adamawa state. Numbering about 280,000, the Bachama are mostly Christian and live in Numan and Lamurde local government areas.

ber 2017, when Bachama youth militias attacked three Fulani herders' settlements – Shaforon, Kikem and Kodemti – in Numan local government area, killing at least 55 people, including 48 children.¹² That incident sparked Fulani reprisals in five Bachama villages in nearby Demsa local government area in the first week of December.¹³ Bachama leaders say over 100 people were killed, some allegedly by two Nigerian Air Force aircraft – an Alpha Jet and an EC135 attack helicopter – deployed to disperse Fulani fighters who were advancing upon Numan town. The air force rejected the allegation, insisting its mission was to fire “warning shots” at the “hideouts of miscreants”. It insisted its intervention caused no casualties and stopped the Fulani attackers from destroying Numan town.¹⁴ Vigorous police and military interventions in Adamawa stopped further major attacks, but killings continue on a smaller scale.¹⁵

The conflict in Adamawa state aggravated longstanding herder-farmer tension in neighbouring Taraba state, where the state government was also proceeding with a plan to ban open grazing, then scheduled to take effect in January. From 4 to 17 January, Fulani and Bachama (and also Yandang, another farming group) fighters traded attacks on each other's settlements, killing at least 124 people and leaving many houses burned, hundreds of livestock stolen or slaughtered, and large farms destroyed, across four local government areas – Wukari, Gassol, Lau and Ibi.¹⁶ Dozens more have been killed in incidents since then, including over 70 who lost their lives from 5 to 8 July in violence between Fulani herders and Yandang farmers in Lau local government area.¹⁷ Many farming and herding villages remain on edge.

This report examines the causes of the upsurge in violence and the federal and state governments' responses thus far, and outlines steps that all those involved can take to stop the bloodshed. It is based on interviews with government and security officials, representatives of herders', farmers', religious and other civil society groups, in Makurdi, Benue state; Lafia, Nasarawa state; and the federal capital, Abuja, between January and June 2018. It updates Crisis Group's September 2017 report, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*.

¹² Nigeria's herders range from fully nomadic tribes to seasonal migrants and nearly settled communities. Some of the communities consist of small clusters of households in temporary camps (*gure*), not established villages like those in which farmers live. Many herder families have fixed abodes, therefore, though they may not live in them year round.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, Bachama youth leader, Abuja, 22 January 2018.

¹⁴ “Air force sends fighter jets to Adamawa, bombs villages”, *The Punch*, 6 December 2017; “On NAF human rights abuse in Numan”, *Daily Trust*, 2 February 2018.

¹⁵ In early January, leaders of a Fulani herders' group, Mobgal Kautal Hore Fulbe, said some among the 4,000 herding families displaced by the fighting were killed as they returned. “MACBAN alleges silent killing of herders in Numan”, *Daily Trust*, 3 January 2018. (The headline of this article wrongly attributes the allegation to a different herders' association.)

¹⁶ “Gunmen kill seven in Taraba”, *Saturday Punch*, 6 January 2018; “Taraba killings: Tears as 65 victims of herdsman attack are buried”, *Leadership*, 13 January 2018; and “Herdsman kill Taraba monarch, 28 others in fresh attacks”, *The Nation*, 20 January 2018.

¹⁷ Police reported seventeen fatalities, but Fulani and Yandang leaders said more than 70 people (23 herders and more than 50 farmers) died and over 50 houses were razed, with thousands of people displaced.

II. Why Are There More Killings?

The sparks for herder-farmer clashes tend to be disagreement over the use of land and water, livestock theft or the obstruction of traditional migration routes. But the conflict's roots lie in the – often forced – migration of herders south from their traditional grazing grounds in northern Nigeria. As drought and desertification have dried up springs and streams across Nigeria's far northern Sahelian belt, large numbers of herders have had to search for alternative pastures and sources of water for their cattle. Insecurity in many northern states, due to the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East and under-reported rural banditry and cattle rustling in other areas, has also driven herders southward. So, too, has the encroachment of settlements, farms and ranches on lands designated as grazing reserves by the post-independence government of the former Northern region (now split into nineteen states).

As the herders migrate into the savannah and rainforest of the central and southern states, they enter regions where high population growth over the last four decades has increased pressure on land.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, disputes over crop damage, water pollution and cattle theft have become more frequent. With the decline of traditional mediation mechanisms and in the absence of mutually accepted alternatives, such quarrels increasingly turn violent.

Two additional factors have aggravated the conflict. While the jihadist Boko Haram indiscriminately killed both Christians and Muslims, it also heightened religious sensitivities, leading mostly Christian southerners to resent the influx of predominantly Muslim herders, which some southern and Middle Belt Christian leaders portray as an Islamising force. The growing availability of illicit firearms – locally produced, circulating from other Nigerian conflict zones in the North East and Niger Delta or smuggled in from other countries – has also enabled the carnage.

Against this backdrop, the 2018 escalation is the result of three more immediate developments: the rise of militias, the persistence of impunity and the passage of grazing bans that are anathema to herders.

A. *Ethnic Militias and Community Vigilantes*

No group – whether Bachama, Berom, Fulani, Tiv or any other – publicly admits it has an organised militia, but all decry inadequate government protection and insist on a right to self-defence. Most militias are backed by ethnic and communal leaders, including politicians, traditional rulers and even holy men, who justify their actions and shield them from arrest and prosecution.

Militias and vigilantes are not new phenomena in the Middle Belt. Over the last decade, some of the region's so-called indigenous groups – including the Berom and Tarok of Plateau state, the Eggon of Nasarawa state and the Jukun of Taraba state, all predominantly farming communities – reportedly formed militias and vigilante groups to fend off Fulani herders whose cattle grazed in their fields. These groups

¹⁸ Over the last 50 years, Nigeria's population has grown fourfold. According to official census figures, the country's population was 56.6 million in 1963, 88.9 million in 1991 and 140 million in 2006. The latest estimate by the National Population Commission reports the population as 198 million in 2018.

sometimes worked hand in hand with traditional authorities and government security forces, but at others attacked herders in retaliation for alleged damage to farms or to force the “strangers” out of their domains. Over time, some of these groups have evolved into more deadly organisations. One of the best known is the Ombatse, a so-called spiritual organisation among the Eggon, which ambushed police and other security operatives in May 2013, killing more than 100.¹⁹ Similarly, as disputes over grazing resources have increased, some herders who initially acquired arms to drive away cattle rustlers have organised or engaged fighters to avenge real or perceived wrongs by farmers or to gain access to fresh pasture.

More recently, militias – both herder and farmer – have been operating in larger numbers than in the past, ranging from dozens to hundreds.²⁰ In addition to mobilising larger numbers, their operations are no longer spontaneous but increasingly premeditated. The assailants are also now better armed, including with AK-47 and other assault rifles, and sometimes dressed in military fatigues. In December 2017, the army commander in Yola, Adamawa state, Brigadier General Muhammed Bello, said herders intending to attack Bachama villages were so well armed that troops had to use rocket-propelled grenades to disperse them.²¹ The quality of the arms suggests the militias have well-heeled patrons. Yahaya Abdullahi, the senator representing Kebbi north senatorial district, contends, “this violence is paying some people, so they are sponsoring it”.²²

The nature of attacks has also changed, now increasingly taking the form of scorched-earth campaigns that kill scores, raze villages and burn down farms. Operating more audaciously, the militias now obstruct and engage security units sent to stop violence and, in some cases, kill police and troops. On 25 January, Bello reported

¹⁹ The Eggon are a small agrarian ethnic group in Nasarawa state, central Nigeria. They are mainly found in Lafia, Akwanga, Keffi and Nasarawa Eggon local government areas. They are estimated to number 250,000; about 20 per cent of them are Christian. For more about the Ombatse, see J. M. Ayuba, *Ombatse: An Invention of Tradition and Understanding Communal Conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria* (Raleigh, 2014). The group still exists but little is heard of it since a November 2014 Fulani attack in which its leader was killed.

²⁰ Residents of Kikan in Adamawa state said their assailants on 21 January 2018 numbered well over 60, chanting war songs in Fulbe (the Fulani language). Crisis Group telephone interview, Kikan resident, 26 February 2018. On 28 January 2018, when an armed group attacked a Fulani community in Kadarko, Nasarawa state, the chairman of the state branch of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Muhammed Hussaini, said the attackers were Tiv militiamen, numbering in the hundreds; “2 missing, 73 cows killed as militia attacks Nasarawa community”, *Daily Trust*, 29 January 2018. In December 2017, when the air force was called in to disperse attackers of Bachama in Adamawa state, the pilots reported they sighted “a large number of hoodlums ... dressed mostly in black”. “Fulani herdsmen shoot NAF fighter jet in Adamawa”, *Daily Post*, 21 December 2017. On 14 March, when gunmen attacked villages in Dekina and Omala local government areas of Kogi state, witnesses said the attackers numbered “about 500”. “Fulani herdsmen kill 32 in Kogi state attack”, *The Guardian*, 16 March 2018. On 3 February 2018, when gunmen attacked police in Yogbo, Benue state, police reported that the attackers were “heavily armed militia group numbering about 200”. “Press statement by public relations officer, Benue State Police Command, assistant superintendent of police, Moses Yamu, Makurdi”, 4 February 2018.

²¹ “Herdsmen kill four policemen as army repels attacks on Numan”, *This Day*, 12 December 2017.

²² “Killings: Our security structures are archaic and collapsing – Sen Abdullahi”, *Leadership*, 2 February 2018.

militias in Adamawa had killed seven policemen and two soldiers since the preceding month.²³ They have killed many more policemen since then.

Armed bandits, essentially criminal groups, operating along the border between Benue and Taraba states compound the insecurity. One such group is headed by Terwase Akwaza (also known as Ghana or Gana). He once claimed to lead a communal defence brigade, but his gang is known to have perpetrated several massacres in order to protect their cattle-rustling racket.²⁴ On 23 January, Akwaza's men killed two riot police and torched two vehicles belonging to the Benue state governor's special adviser on security.²⁵ Fulani and other herders' groups say Akwaza's gang is responsible for attacks on farmers in the area that have been erroneously blamed on herders.²⁶ It is not clear how much bandits are adding to the rising death toll. What is certain is that their activities, including attacks on security personnel, impede efforts to quell farmer-herder violence.

B. *Impunity and a Poor Response to Early Warnings*

Both farmers and herders complain that their demands for justice for past criminal acts and warnings of imminent attacks get little or no response from federal authorities. For instance, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), a prominent herders' group, alleges that the government has arrested no one in the murder of, according to its own statistics, about 1,000 Fulani herders, including women and children, and the slaughter or theft of two million cattle, over the period June 2017-January 2018.²⁷ In another case, the Fulani were dissatisfied with an investigative panel the Adamawa state government set up after the November 2017 killings of over 55 Fulani in attacks by Bachama youth militias in Numan. They said the panel fell short because it lacked judicial authority. A Fulani youth group, Jonde Jam Fulani Youth Association of Nigeria (JAFUYAN), vowed reprisals "if the federal government

²³ "Seven policemen, two soldiers die in Adamawa crisis", *This Day*, 26 January 2018.

²⁴ Akwaza's gang has clashed with a state-sponsored vigilante group, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTTF), later renamed the Livestock Guards, headed by Alhaji Aliyu Tashaku. In one incident in January 2017, gunmen suspected to be from Akwaza's group killed ten CJTTF members in Katsina-Ala, Benue state. The Benue state government initially offered 5 million naira for any information that could lead to Akwaza's arrest, then upped the reward to 10 million naira and later to 50 million. He remains at large.

²⁵ "Wanted militia kingpin kills 2 policemen in Benue", *Daily Trust*, 26 January 2018.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, official of the Fulani herders' group, Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore (MAKH), Abuja, 10 February 2018.

²⁷ MACBAN published a list of its losses: 700 people killed on Mambilla plateau in Taraba state; 24 Fulani killed in Lau, Taraba state; 82 women and children killed by Bachama militias in Numan, Adamawa state; and 96 killed in Kajuru, Kaduna state. "Mambilla genocide against the Fulani: Who is the real liar?", *Daily Trust*, 20 January 2018. The Taraba state government disagreed, citing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organisations that visited Mambilla and recorded at most eighteen deaths on both sides. The newspaper *Daily Trust*, which covered the incident, reported about 200 killed. "Genocide in Mambilla", *Daily Trust*, 3 July 2017.

fails to act fast”, saying speedy justice for the victims was “the only way to peace”.²⁸ The aggrieved Fulani soon attacked Bachama villages nearby.²⁹

Similarly, Benue Governor Samuel Ortom reported that in the late months of 2017 he sent several letters to President Buhari and federal security chiefs, alerting them to the danger of herder militia strikes on farmers in his state. He said he received no response.³⁰ The police inspector general claimed the governor's alerts did not reach him.³¹ The presidency said the letter it received did not “mention any threat to any specific one of the 23 local governments ... so the best the law enforcement agencies could do ... was to await information or intelligence of an imminent attack. None came”.³² According to a news report, organisations representing the Tiv, Idoma and Igede also issued alerts of impending attacks by herders.³³

The warnings may not have provided precise actionable intelligence, but they appear to have been sufficiently clear that, had police followed them up vigorously, they may have prevented some of the January attacks. Indeed, even without these notices, there are questions around whether the police and other security agencies should have been able to gather their own information on the herder militias' plans.

Until the violence escalated dramatically in January, the government's response to most incidents had been long on condemnations, condolences and vows to stop further killings, but short on effective preventive action.³⁴ This apathy is in marked contrast to the Buhari administration's vigorous response to other real or perceived security threats, such as the Shiite group, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, cattle

²⁸ “Press release by national president of Jonde Jam Fulani Youth Association of Nigeria, Alhaji Saidu Maikano”, 24 November 2017.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, MACBAN official, Abuja, 9 February 2018.

³⁰ “We saw the Benue attacks coming – Ortom”, *Leadership*, 10 January 2018; “Blame Buhari, Osinbajo, NSA, IG for Benue killings, Ortom tells Senate”, *The Punch*, 14 January 2018; “Ortom releases letters sent to VP, others before Benue killings”, *The Guardian*, 15 February 2018.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “Yemi Osinbajo denies alert by governor Ortom on Benue's mayhem”, *The Guardian*, 16 January 2018.

³³ For instance, on 9 November 2017, the umbrella socio-cultural organisations of the Tiv, Idoma and Igede (Mdzough U Tiv Forum, Idoma National Forum and Omi Ny Igede Forum) issued an open petition to President Buhari, alleging that armed Fulani were converging on the Nigeria-Cameroon border and in the Agatu area near Benue's boundary with Nasarawa state. They took out full-page advertisements in national dailies to warn of impending attacks on farming villages. And on 7 November, the chair of Logo local government area, Richard Nyajo, raised the alarm that Fulani herders were forming a ring around the council area with the intent to launch an attack. “Benue defends anti-grazing law”, *The Punch*, 8 November 2017.

³⁴ Notably, Buhari had been silent on this conflict in major statements: presenting his 2018 budget proposals to the National Assembly in November 2017, he listed the government's spending priorities for peace, security and development as focusing on the Niger Delta, North East and “violent crime across the country”, specifically “the growing scourges of cattle rustling and banditry that have plagued our communities in Kaduna, Niger, Kebbi, Katsina and Zamfara states...armed robbery, kidnapping and cyber-crimes”, but not the farmer-herder conflict. “2018 budget speech: Budget of consolidation delivered by: His excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, president, Federal Republic of Nigeria at the joint session of the National Assembly, Abuja, Tuesday, 7th of November 2017”. In his 1 January New Year address, Buhari said the government had “beaten Boko Haram” and was working “to protect all Nigerians”, mentioning “immediate short-term measures” to combat “rampant cases of kidnapping”, but again not the farmer-herder conflict.

rustlers in Zamfara state and secessionist agitators in the South East.³⁵ In the Middle Belt and south, many believe that Buhari is inattentive to the killings because he himself is a Fulani and complicit in herders' attacks, a charge the president and his aides totally reject.³⁶ Indeed, given that the government has been unable to curb the parallel escalation of armed banditry and killings in predominantly Muslim Zamfara state, the charge of pro-Fulani bias is unsustainable. The government's failure to either punish perpetrators of previous violence or respond to distress calls has, however, emboldened militias involved in herder-farmer violence.

C. *Anti-grazing Laws*

The third proximate cause of the heightened herder-farmer tension is the introduction of open grazing bans in Benue and Taraba states. Most people in Benue reject any connection between the new state law, which bars herders from letting their cattle graze where they please, and the escalation of violence. They argue, with some justification, that killings preceded the law and take place in states far from Benue where there is no such prohibition. But introduction of the law further strained relations between farmers and herders.

Governor Ortom signed the Benue state law in May 2017, and it took effect on 1 November. The law permits livestock to graze only on ranches; requires people who rear livestock to buy land and establish ranches; prohibits movement of animals within the state except by rail or road; and spells out punishments, including five years' jail time or a 1 million naira (about \$3,000) fine, for anyone whose cattle are grazing outside a ranch.³⁷ In other words, it outlaws the pastoralism practiced by many Fulani for generations. The Taraba state law, the provisions of which are largely the same, officially took effect on 24 January 2018. But acknowledging herders' concerns and seeking to avoid the deadly consequences suffered in Benue state, the Taraba government first said it would phase in the transition from open grazing to ranching, and then, on 20 February, agreed to suspend enforcement of the law altogether.³⁸

The Benue and Taraba laws' main rationale, according to state governors, legislators and other political leaders, is to curb conflicts – as open grazing and the de-

³⁵ In 2015, army troops clashed with Islamic Movement of Nigeria members, killing more than 300 people, an action strongly endorsed, if not directly ordered by Buhari. Crisis Group Commentary, "New Risks on Nigeria's Shiite Fault Line", 16 December 2015. Responding to cattle rustling and other banditry in Zamfara state, Buhari ordered a military operation. "Cattle rustling: Buhari launches special task force Wednesday", *Daily Trust*, 10 July 2016. In response to Biafra separatist agitation in the South East, the government deployed troops and declared the group spearheading the agitation, the so-called Indigenous People of Biafra, a terrorist organisation.

³⁶ "Killings have nothing to do with Buhari being Fulani – Femi Adesina", *Vanguard*, 14 January 2018; "To suggest that I, being Fulani, must be encouraging satanic acts is evil – Buhari", *Vanguard*, 6 July 2018.

³⁷ Section 19 (4) and (5), "Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017 government of Benue State", Nigeria. The law also provides for compensation to victims whose farms or property are damaged by cattle, and two years' imprisonment for anyone whose cattle injure a person. It also stipulates penalties for cattle rustling.

³⁸ "Taraba gov agrees to revisit anti-grazing law", *Daily Trust*, 21 February 2018.

struction of crops by trespassing cattle are major factors in farmer-herder violence.³⁹ In Benue state, there were 49 violent incidents across fourteen of the 23 local government areas from 2012 to 2017.⁴⁰ The state government argues that the only solution is to compel cattle owners to confine their herds to ranches.

The Tiv, Idoma and Igede farmers, who together constitute over 90 per cent of the Benue population and consider themselves indigenes, strongly supported the Benue state law.⁴¹ Many organised rallies demanding or supporting its enforcement from 1 November.⁴² But Fulani and other herder organisations, notably MACBAN and Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore (MAKH), oppose the law, with MAKH mounting a court challenge.⁴³ Their opposition is based on at least five counts.⁴⁴

First, herder and Fulani groups insisted that the state government did not consult them prior to enacting the law and that, as a result, the law does not accommodate their members' interests. The state government disputes that claim, pointing out that all groups were invited to relevant deliberations, that the state house of assembly held four public hearings (one each in Otukpo, Gboko and Katsina-Ala for the three senatorial zones and a final meeting in the state capital, Makurdi) about the

³⁹ The state also argued that open grazing deprives the state of tax revenue because collection agencies do not have systems for tracking, assessing and taxing cattle herders. Ranching, the argument goes, would formalise cattle breeding and add to state revenues. Proponents add that ranching would enable fuller exploitation of agriculture value chain opportunities: making cattle owners pay for grass and other feed would create more jobs and reduce rural poverty. Furthermore, rearing cattle in ranches would lead to healthier and more productive stock, with higher meat and dairy yields, and other animal by-products.

⁴⁰ Figure provided by Tiv Professional Group chairman, Professor Zacharys Anger Gundu, at press conference in Makurdi, Benue state, 20 January 2018. The state government reports that between 2013 and 2016, about 1,878 people were killed and 750 seriously wounded, with 200 still missing. A total of 99,427 households were affected, with billions of naira in property losses. Data presented by Governor Samuel Ortom at a meeting with the UN country representative, Edward Kallon, Makurdi, 5 July 2017. The governor claimed that, in 2014 alone, farmer-herder violence destroyed property worth over 95 billion naira (about \$264 million).

⁴¹ In Nigeria, "indigenes" are people recognised as indigenous to a state, as opposed to "settlers", and are granted preferences in education, land ownership, political participation and state government employment. Herder groups are generally not recognised as indigenes in the Middle Belt and southern states.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Movement Against Fulani Occupation (MAFO) legal counsel, 23 February 2018. In the last week of October, Chief Edward Ujege, president general of the pan-Tiv socio-cultural organisation Mdzough U Tiv, threatened that his people would enforce the law themselves if the governor postponed the commencement date past 1 November. On 31 October and 1 November, several pro-indigene groups, notably MAFO, the Strict Movement Against Ravages in Tiv Land (Strict-Land) and the Vanguard Against Tiv Massacre (VATIM), organised massive pro-grazing ban rallies in the state capital, Makurdi. Leaders of other major ethnic groups in the state, including the Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw and Hausa, issued solidarity messages during the rallies. On 2 November, thousands of women from throughout the state marched through Makurdi to urge full implementation of the law.

⁴³ "Miyetti Allah sues Benue govt over grazing law", *Daily Trust*, 8 August 2017. Statements by MACBAN officials suggested they were not opposed to the law in principle, but were protesting several provisions they found unfavourable, as well as the state government's failure to aid ranch establishment.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, official, Benue state branch of MACBAN, Makurdi, 17 January 2018; telephone interview, chairman, Taraba state branch of MACBAN, 18 February 2018.

bill and that a majority of lawmakers representing all constituencies in the state passed the law. As constituencies are demarcated by geography and population rather than ethnicity, and Fulani herders are small minorities in all districts, this last contention is misleading.

Secondly, herders' groups argued, with some justification, that the law allowed cattle owners and herders no time to purchase land, establish ranches and confine their cattle. The state government countered that the six months from May 2017 (when the law was signed) to 1 November (when enforcement began) were enough time for herders to adjust. Any call for an extension, it said, was probably just "a clever way of evading the law".⁴⁵

Thirdly, herders protested the law as inimical to their centuries-old pastoralist culture. Saleh Alhassan, national secretary of the Fulani socio-cultural association MAKH, said: "Anti-grazing laws are nothing but populist agendas designed by visionless and desperate politicians to destroy our means of livelihood. These laws are oppressive and negative and are fundamentally against our culture as Fulani pastoralists".⁴⁶ The government responded that culture is dynamic and that practices violating the rights and harming the livelihoods of other groups sharing the same geographical space must be modified.

Fourthly, herders said the law denies them their constitutional rights to free movement and residence in any part of the country. On this point, the state government maintained that constitutional rights apply to citizens, not animals, and that the state has a right to regulate economic activities, especially when these infringe upon the livelihoods of others.⁴⁷

Lastly, herders argued that certain provisions of the law, such as the requirements that ranchers can lease but not buy land, and that they must renew their permits annually, are not designed to encourage ranching but to chase herders out of Benue. Indeed, this claim is arguably their fundamental objection to the law.⁴⁸

Regardless, the Benue state government forged ahead. It established a Livestock Special Task Force headed by the special security adviser to the governor (retired Colonel Edwin Jando) with security agents, traditional rulers and technocrats as members. It created six "pilot ranches" that in reality were holding pens for seized livestock, and it transformed a 2,500-member state-wide vigilante group, known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), into a law enforcement agency, officially designated as the Benue Livestock Guards.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ "Anti-open grazing law, solution to herdsman's attacks – Benue", *Sunday Punch*, 5 November 2017.

⁴⁶ Statement at a press conference in Abuja, 30 May 2017.

⁴⁷ "Benue defends anti-grazing law", *The Punch*, 8 November 2017.

⁴⁸ For more on the anti-grazing law, see Chris M. A. Kwaja and Bukola I. Ademola-Adelehin, "The Implications of Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranch Establishment Laws for Farmer-Herder Relations in the Middle Belt of Nigeria", Search for Common Ground, Washington, 17 December 2017.

⁴⁹ The name came from the Civilian Joint Task Force helping the military fight Boko Haram insurgents in Borno state. The CJTF in Benue state is a grassroots Hausa-Fulani-Tiv-Idoma organisation fighting cattle rustling and banditry under the direct supervision of the federal police and the Benue and Nasarawa state governments. Its members are not authorised to bear arms, but some have acquired guns, which they use in "terrorising both Fulani herders and Tiv farmers". Crisis Group interview, former police commissioner, Makurdi, 18 January 2018.

The ban kept cattle herds off farms and saved crops from being eaten or trampled.⁵⁰ But it posed great challenges for herders. Some herders said livestock guards seized roaming cattle, arbitrarily imposed penalties on their owners and extorted fines before releasing the animals.⁵¹ In remote locales, others said, bandits unaffiliated to the guards seized cattle arbitrarily under the pretext of enforcing the law.⁵² Complying with the law meant confining cattle in pens but, with no arrangements for production and supply of feed, herders had to start buying grass, rice chaff and water for their cattle, costs they had never borne before.⁵³ One herder leader said: “The cattle business cannot be profitable if we have to bear these costs”.⁵⁴ The MACBAN coordinator in Benue state, Garus Gololo, said the situation was “unfortunate and unacceptable”, blaming the law for the escalation of violence in January 2018.⁵⁵

The law prompted an exodus of herders from Benue state to Nasarawa, Taraba and Cross River states. In Nasarawa, MACBAN leader Alhaji Musa Muahhed-Mati asserts that two million cows from Benue state had crossed into Awe local government area as of 3 November 2017. This figure is likely exaggerated: on the same 3 November, the Benue MACBAN leader said “about 3,000 herdsman have moved to neighbouring states in Nasarawa and Taraba” and on 7 November, the Benue state governor’s special assistant on herders’ matters, Alhaji Shehu Tambaya, said about 3,600 of the 6,000 herders had left, along with some 10,000 of the 16,000 cattle owned by Fulani in the state.⁵⁶ Regardless of these discrepancies, the sudden influx of thousands of cattle into Nasarawa state created new tensions between the predominantly Fulani herders and the mostly Tiv farmers. In spite of the state government’s efforts, the mistrust soon degenerated into deadly violence.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, special assistant to the governor on herdsman matters, Alhaji Shehu Tambaya, Makurdi, 18 January 2018.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, herder, Makurdi, 17 January 2018.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, vigilante leader, Makurdi, 17 January 2018.

⁵³ “3,000 herdsman have relocated from Benue – Herdsman national coordinator”, *Sunday Tribune*, 5 November 2017.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, herders’ association representative, Makurdi, 17 January 2018.

⁵⁵ Statement issued in Abuja, 6 January 2018. See also “We warned Ortom – MACBAN”, *Blueprint*, 9 January 2018.

⁵⁶ “3,000 herdsman have relocated from Benue – Herdsman national coordinator”, *Sunday Tribune*, 5 November 2017.

III. Humanitarian and Economic Toll

The surge of attacks and counter-attacks has exacted heavy humanitarian and economic tolls, with potentially serious political and security repercussions. The humanitarian impact is particularly grave. From September 2017 through June 2018, farmer-herder violence left at least 1,500 people dead, many more wounded and about 300,000 displaced – an estimated 176,000 in Benue, about 100,000 in Nasarawa, over 100,000 in Plateau, about 19,000 in Taraba and an unknown number in Adamawa.⁵⁷ Two thirds of these people have fled since January.

Some of the displaced are staying with kin in safer parts of their home states, but many are taking refuge in IDP camps, many located on school and church premises, and run by state emergency management agencies. Crisis Group visited two of the ten camps in Benue state and found appalling conditions: IDPs, mostly women and children, had severely inadequate shelter and food, and were at risk of communicable disease.⁵⁸ The camps are overcrowded and lack safe drinking water; poor sanitation is compounded by open defecation. Six of the camps are housed in primary schools; in some cases, up to 100 people are jammed into a classroom while others sleep in the fields, at the mercy of rains and mosquitoes. In early April, at least seven children died from an outbreak of measles at the sprawling Abagena camp on the outskirts of the Benue state capital, Makurdi, which houses an estimated 35,000 people. Others have died of malaria and diarrhoea.⁵⁹

Women and children are particularly hard-hit, many having lost the male head of household, a huge loss in a largely patriarchal society. Some were raped by attackers.⁶⁰ Thousands of pregnant women and nursing mothers in IDP camps have little or no health and sanitary facilities. As most camps have no perimeter fencing and sleeping spaces are not gender-segregated, girls and women are exposed to the risks of sexual harassment, assault and rape, both by outsiders and by fellow IDPs, and vulnerable to desperate survival mechanisms involving sexual exploitation. Many women and children are traumatised by the killings, raising concerns for their mental health, with possibly long-term effects.⁶¹

Children's education has also been badly hurt: in April, the executive secretary of the Benue state Teaching Service Board, Wilfred Uji, reported that persistent attacks had forced 300,000 children out of school; and twelve of the state's 24 nomadic schools (special schools for pastoralist children) were shut down.⁶² In Nasarawa

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, coordinator of IDP camp in Jalingo, Taraba state, Abuja, 9 February 2018; "Taraba to resettle 19,000 victims of Katibu herdsman attacks", *The Punch*, 22 January 2018. In January 2018, MAKH said over 4,000 herders and their families were displaced by the November 2017 clashes with the Bachama.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group observations during visits to two camps, RCM Primary School in Daudu and LGEA Central Primary School in Gbajimba, Benue state, 17 January 2018.

⁵⁹ "Measles outbreak in IDP camp kills seven children", *The Guardian*, 6 April 2018.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Sewuese Bumkeng, female activist, February 2018.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Torhile Tsavbee, camp manager, IDP camp at LGEA Central Primary School, Gbajimba, Benue state, 17 January 2018.

⁶² "Herdsman attacks force 300,000 Benue pupils out of school", *The Punch*, 18 April 2018; "Herdsman's invasion has destroyed our school system", *Daily Sun*, 10 July 2018; Crisis Group interview, National Commission for Nomadic Education official, Makurdi, 18 January 2018.

state, armed attacks and the establishment of IDP camps have forced over 35 primary schools to close, interrupting the education of thousands of children.⁶³

The growing humanitarian challenge has almost overwhelmed the capacities of state emergency management agencies. Particularly in Benue and Plateau, the state governments' resources are badly overstretched, undercutting their ability to provide medical care, food, clothing and infrastructure in the camps. Dickson Tarkighir, the member of the House of Representatives from the Makurdi/Guma constituency, said: "Our people are starving to death in their own land, and the irony is that we are farmers".⁶⁴ On 18 July, the World Health Organization announced plans to build makeshift clinics and provide routine immunisation for children under five years old in the Plateau state camps. But much more needs to be done to meet the IDPs' food, health care, water and sanitation needs, particularly in Benue and Plateau states. Without scaled-up assistance, the ongoing rainy season (May to September), by limiting access to remote areas and heightening health risks, is likely to worsen the IDPs' plight.

If the escalating violence has brought a heavy human cost, its impact on local economies is also significant. Population displacements and continuing insecurity have disrupted agriculture in parts of Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states. Thousands of herders displaced from Benue state cannot find enough fodder for their herds in Nasarawa state, as the cattle multiply and graze all the pastures bare. Thousands of farmers, fearing attacks, are unable to work their farms. In Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states, food production is variously estimated to drop by 33 per cent to 65 per cent in 2018 as a result of attacks and population displacement in farming villages.⁶⁵ This predicament, in states that make up much of Nigeria's breadbasket, could affect food production nationwide, drive up already high food prices and imperil businesses related to agriculture. It may also deepen already widespread rural poverty in the North Central geopolitical zone.

⁶³ "Herdsman attacks: 35 primary schools shut in Nasarawa", *Daily Sun*, 8 June 2018.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, member of Benue state House of Representatives, Abuja, 24 January 2018.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Nasarawa state House of Assembly member, Abuja, 21 January 2018. See also "Herdsman: Anxiety in states over food shortage", *The Punch*, 4 February 2018; "Food shortage looms", *Sunday Sun*, 3 June 2018; "Herdsman's killings: Hunger, starvation imminent in Taraba", *Daily Sun*, 20 July 2018.

IV. Deepening Ethnic Divides and the 2019 Elections

The violence has solidified conspiracy theories around the farmer-herder conflict, stirring charges and counter-charges of pogroms and even worse. The Fulani youth group, JAFUYAN, said the killings in Numan were “the latest in a coordinated agenda to wipe out our people systematically through ethnic cleansing”.⁶⁶ Many Fulani believe that other groups across the country have hatched a grand plot against them. Parallel accusations swirl among agrarian groups. Following the early January attacks in Benue state, the pre-eminent Tiv traditional ruler, His Royal Majesty James Ortese Ayatse, said they were “well planned ... nothing short of ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Tiv nation”.⁶⁷ Many people, not just farmers, across the Middle Belt and southern states believe herders are intent on seizing their lands.⁶⁸ The welter of accusations is undermining national cohesion and complicating prospects for resolving the conflicts.

The escalation is further polarising Nigerians along ethnic, religious and regional lines. Particularly in Benue state, more people say they have lost confidence in the country's unity.⁶⁹ In the South East, secessionist agitators point to the killings as vindication of their contention that the country is “a fraudulent arrangement for extending Fulani dominance to all other groups”.⁷⁰

Heightened violence, particularly increasing attacks on farmers, has hardened anti-Fulani sentiment. In Kogi state, for instance, the legislature called on the executive to establish a program for capturing the biometric data of all herders in the state for security planning and other purposes.⁷¹ Enmity is deepened by the claims of some Fulani elites, such as Professor Umar Mohammed Labdo, that “a large chunk of what is today's North Central or what some people prefer to call the Middle Belt today were actually territories belonging to the Sokoto caliphate”.⁷² Such claims only reinforce fears of Fulani territorial expansion.

The anti-Fulani feeling has led to ethnically motivated killings. On 1 February, for instance, a mob lynched seven Fulani men at a public transport terminal in Gboko,

⁶⁶ “Numan killings: Fulani youths spit fire, demand justice”, *Daily Sun*, 25 November 2017.

⁶⁷ “Benue killings: It's ethnic cleansing, genocide against Tiv nation, says Tor Tiv”, *The Guardian*, 13 January 2018.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Benue civil society leaders, legislators, journalists, Makurdi, 17-18 January 2018; Abuja, 5-9 February 2018.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, representatives of ethnic and other civil society groups, Makurdi 17-18 January, Abuja 25 June 2018.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, senior member of the Movement for Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, 17 April 2018.

⁷¹ The call was made in a resolution adopted on 27 February 2018. Ekiti state Governor Ayodele Fayose summoned leaders of the Fulani community and told the Sarkin Fulani, Muhammed Abashe, he would hold him personally responsible for any herder-related violence and ordered that all Fulani in the state “register with the government for a token fee of 5,000 naira”. “Herdsman killing: Fayose to hold Fulani leaders responsible for reprisal attack”, *This Day*, 22 January 2018. Ondo state Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu vowed to “defend the right of our people to engage in farming without any let or hindrance”, threatening to “sanction with impassioned severity any acts which seek to tilt the balance of harmonious coexistence in the state toward anarchy”. “Akeredolu to Fulani herdsman: Steer clear of Ondo”, *New Telegraph*, 15 January 2018.

⁷² “Herdsman can graze anywhere in Nigeria”, *Saturday Sun*, 21 July 2018.

Benue state.⁷³ The incident occurred at the height of local outrage over the herders' early January attacks. The victims were not accused of any crime or involved in any altercation with the local Tiv youths. They were seized from a vehicle in which they were travelling to another town. Following the 23-24 June attacks on Berom farming villages in Barkin Ladi local government area of Plateau state, Berom youths blocked highways and murdered an unknown number of Fulani – or suspected Fulani – travellers. Such killings could provoke further revenge attacks and wider violence.

The continuing bloodshed is damaging inter-religious relations. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) denounced the Benue attacks, alleging that prominent Muslims were egging on herders to conduct a disguised jihadist campaign.⁷⁴ In response, the foremost Islamic group, the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) charged that CAN was spreading “venom, hatred, calumny and unimaginable malice that smacks of intolerance and political brigandage”.⁷⁵

The recent killings could also alter northern political dynamics. Historically, the Hausa and Fulani dominant in the north have promoted unity with the Middle Belt, which has worked to both regions' advantage in Nigerian politics. The killings have sent ripples through that relationship. Many Middle Belt residents believe Fulani and Hausa elites are soft on, if not supportive of, the herders' attacks.

For instance, though the chairman of the Northern Governors' Forum and Borno state Governor Kashim Shettima and a delegation of northern governors paid a visit to Governor Ortom to express sympathy for the killings, many in Benue believe that gesture was an afterthought, coming only after delegations from the south had visited.⁷⁶ Others accused northern governors of complicity in the killings because they never condemned the killers. Their visit was dismissed as mockery, “dancing on the victims' graves”.⁷⁷ Pressure groups in Benue state have urged Ortom to pull out of the Northern Governors' Forum and the state's traditional rulers to quit the Northern Traditional Rulers Council.⁷⁸ Such developments could weaken the north's longstanding political solidarity.

The surge of violence has also eroded confidence in the federal government. Among farmers, there is a growing feeling that the government is insensitive to and even complicit in their plight. Herders, meanwhile, express frustration at the government's failure to challenge the Benue and Taraba state anti-grazing laws, though they remain loyal to Buhari overall.

The violence could directly affect the February 2019 elections. For one, insecurity in parts of Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba and Adamawa states could hamper the electoral preparations. Already, displacement has disrupted voter registration in several

⁷³ “Benue: How 7 were killed, burnt in Gboko”, *Daily Trust*, 3 February 2018.

⁷⁴ “Massacre, a jihad against Christians, CAN alleges”, *The Guardian*, 12 January 2018; “Benue killings jihad, genocide – CAN”, *New Telegraph*, 14 January 2018.

⁷⁵ “NSCIA attacks CAN, accuses it of hate speech”, *Vanguard*, 31 January 2018.

⁷⁶ Delegations from the pan-Yoruba group, Afenifere, the pan-Igbo group, Ohaneze Ndi'Igbo, and others from the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt had previously visited.

⁷⁷ Professor David Iornem, chairman, Benue Advancement Forum, at news conference in Makurdi, Benue state, 20 January 2018.

⁷⁸ “Benue may cut alignment with north over killings”, *Vanguard*, 23 January 2018.

towns in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states.⁷⁹ Farmer-herder tension and ethnic antagonism could hinder campaigning in certain places.

The killings have severely undermined one of President Buhari's major 2015 campaign pledges – to bring security and stability to the country. His inability to curb the escalating violence, and particularly his long delay before visiting the hardest-hit states, have been roundly condemned in the Middle Belt and south, but also by some northern leaders who accuse him of lacking empathy for the groups bearing the brunt of the conflict.⁸⁰ Already, the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) has sought to exploit Buhari's perceived weakness. Following the January killings in Benue state, key PDP officials, including Chairman Prince Uche Secondus, visited the state to offer condolences and to persuade voters that the party is more sensitive to the region's travails.

The violence could hurt the fortunes of Buhari and his ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2019 elections. In 2015, Buhari and his party won Benue state by only a narrow margin. Widespread disenchantment with his handling of the conflict could erode that advantage.⁸¹ A young Tiv activist said: "It's going to be zero votes for the APC in Benue in 2019".⁸² For now, most APC leaders in the state deny they will abandon the ruling party, but it is not certain they will stand firm.⁸³ On 25 July, Governor Ortom himself defected from the APC to the PDP.⁸⁴

Beyond Benue, the killings, along with the unending Boko Haram insurgency and spiralling bandit violence in the North West, have also diminished Buhari's support across the country. Massive protest rallies held by Catholics in Abuja and other major cities on 22 May, and by civil society coalitions in Abuja on 28 May and 4 July, underscored public disenchantment with his responses to insecurity. On 18 July, a Summit of National Elders and Leaders of Nigeria, convened by the Northern Elders Forum, the Yoruba group Afenifere from the South West, the Igbo group Ohaneze Ndigbo from the South East, and the Pan-Niger Delta Forum, condemned the "unprecedented" and "incessant killings". With the presidential election seven months

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Independent National Electoral Commission official, Abuja, 12 February 2018.

⁸⁰ "Refining northern geopolitics: Perspectives on Buhari's rejection", *The Guardian*, 1 April 2018.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews, several political and civil society leaders, Makurdi, Lafia and Abuja, 15-24 January 2018. Josephine Habba, a Benue-based civil society activist and coordinator of the national network of non-governmental organisations, said, "if the president cannot come here to sympathise with the Benue people, he should also not come here to campaign for the 2019 election". On 9 April, Buhari declared he would seek another term. His candidacy still needs party approval in primaries but, as there is no internal challenger, that is seen as a formality.

⁸² Crisis Group telephone interview, young Tiv activist, 15 February 2018.

⁸³ On 7 February, Cross River state Governor Nyesom Wike visited Makurdi and gave 200 million naira (about \$550,000). "Gov Wike donates N200m to Benue IDPs, condemns killings", *Leadership*, 8 February 2018. He was followed by Ekiti state Governor Ayodele Fayose, chairperson of the PDP Governors Forum and a fierce Buhari critic, who visited on 8 February and donated 10 million naira (about \$27,000). "Fayose visits Benue, reiterates call for restructuring", *The Guardian*, 9 February 2018. On 16 January, Prince Secondus visited and gave millions of naira in relief aid. "PDP donates items to Benue IDPs", *Leadership*, 17 January 2018.

⁸⁴ "Benue governor, Ortom, defects to PDP", *Premium Times*, 25 July 2018.

away, the leaders resolved “to insist on the emergence of a visionary and dynamic leadership which will deal effectively with our security and economic challenges”.⁸⁵

On the other hand, Buhari's handling of the conflict has boosted his support among the Fulani and some other northern groups. Bello Abdullahi Bodejo (Lamido Fulbe), president of MAKH, said Fulani across the country would resist any attempt to stop Buhari from serving a second term.⁸⁶ These sharply opposed positions on the Buhari presidency could feed into inter-party, inter-regional and inter-faith tensions around the elections.

⁸⁵ “Wanted: Visionary and dynamic leadership – communiqué of the National Summit on Insecurity and Killings in Nigeria”, Abuja, 18 July 2018. The presidency dismissed the communiqué as the “shedding of crocodile tears by selfish leaders” who felt alienated after a transparent and accountable system “halted their disproportionate survival on the resources of the state”. Statement by the senior special assistant to the President on Media, Aso Rock Villa, Abuja, 20 July 2018.

⁸⁶ Bodejo said: “Nobody should try to remove Buhari in 2019. All the Fulani in Nigeria today, our eyes are open. All of us are behind Buhari We will not allow anybody to intimidate the federal government or to take Buhari's mandate; we will be ready to follow him and fight it. We are ready to do anything to ensure that Buhari comes back to complete the good work he is doing. The people criticising him are just a few and nothing would affect his chances of coming back”. “Politicians buy arms for herdsmen – Bodejo, Miyetti Allah President”, *Saturday Sun*, 3 February 2018. Earlier in January, the Bauchi state branch of MAKH endorsed Buhari – and state governor Mohammed Abdullahi Abubakar – for a second term based on their “good performances” over the past three years. “2019: Miyetti Allah endorses PMB”, *Leadership*, 26 January 2018.

V. Eroding Confidence in Security Forces

The rising violence is encouraging the formation of armed community defence groups and ethnic militias. Across the Middle Belt and southern zones, several youth, farmers' and other groups have said they will resist any further influx of herders and asked governors for logistical support in doing so.⁸⁷ The prevailing insecurity could aggravate arms proliferation, already a major national concern.

The conflict is placing further strain on the already stressed police, military and other security forces. The army, deployed in internal security operations in virtually all of the Nigerian federation's 36 states, has insufficient men to ward off Boko Haram insurgents, particularly in Borno state.⁸⁸ The deployment of more police and soldiers to states afflicted by the escalating farmer-herder violence, admittedly a necessity, is further stretching resources that could have been concentrated on countering the insurgency in the North East, possibly prolonging insecurity in that region.

The spiralling violence has eroded public confidence in the government's military and other security agencies, leading to calls for Buhari to sack his military and security chiefs. On 24 January, the Situation Room, a coalition of over 70 civil society organisations, issued a statement lamenting that the "Nigerian nation appears to be descending into chaos" and the security agencies "have exhibited unparalleled incapacity and incompetence to deal with the problem".⁸⁹ It called on Buhari to hold his security chiefs accountable for failing to protect citizens, punish incompetence and urgently revamp the nation's security apparatus.⁹⁰ Since then, many others, including retired senior military officers, have joined the call for new security chiefs who may respond to the violence more effectively.⁹¹ A herders' group opposed these demands, however, saying "people calling for the removal of service chiefs are either the corrupt politicians or the ones working for them".⁹² So far, Buhari has not complied with the calls.

⁸⁷ These include the National Council of Tiv Youths, Middle Belt Youth Council and the Middle Belt Forum (Youth Wing), as well as the Odua'a People's Congress (OPC) and Agbekoya Farmers Association in the South West and the Movement for Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra in the South East. "Regional militias, youths prepare for battle against herdsman", *The Punch*, 21 January 2018; "Herdsman OPC, Agbekoya mobilize fighters in south west", *The Punch*, 4 February 2018; "M'Belt leaders ask youths to defend themselves, property", *The Guardian*, 1 February 2018.

⁸⁸ At his presentation to the Senate Committee on the Army, the chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, said the army is "currently engaging in the war against Boko Haram and other internal security operations – virtually in all the 36 states of the federation". "Poor funding, security operations crippling army – Buratai", *The Punch*, 2 February 2018.

⁸⁹ "Situation Room's concerns on the state of the nation", statement issued in Abuja, Nigeria, 24 January 2018. Earlier, on 20 January, the Tiv Professional Group called on Buhari to sack police chief Ibrahim Idris over what it described as his incompetence, complacency and open bias toward herders.

⁹⁰ Several senators also called on Buhari to sack the service chiefs. "Killings: Sack service chiefs now, senators tell Buhari", *The Nation*, 18 April 2018.

⁹¹ "Killings: Sack service chiefs now, senators tell Buhari", *The Nation*, 18 April 2018; "Sack service chiefs within 2 weeks now, groups beg Buhari", *Vanguard*, 4 May 2018; "Incessant killings: Sack non-performing service chiefs, Col. Bako, ex-military administrator tells Buhari", *Sunday Sun*, 15 July 2018.

⁹² "Killings: Miyetti Allah rejects calls for service chiefs' sacking", *The Punch*, 3 July 2018.

Moreover, with most of the military and other security agencies headed by officers from the North East and North West, many in the central and southern states believe the security establishment is biased.⁹³ This perception may not be correct, but it has heightened demands from the Middle Belt and south for greater regional balance and inclusiveness in the National Security Council, which they claim would enable it to respond to the farmer-herder conflict more effectively.

The military's deepening involvement in managing the conflict could also tarnish its image. For instance, in Adamawa state, where the air force was deployed in December 2017, the Bachama and Bwatiye, locked in conflict with Fulani herders, claim warplanes sent to prevent Fulani attacks on their villages instead fired rockets upon the villagers.⁹⁴ The air force strongly denied the charge, though some security sources told Crisis Group the villages were hit in error.⁹⁵ On 24 March 2018, Theophilus Danjuma, a retired lieutenant general and one of the army's most revered former chiefs, accused the armed forces of complicity in "ethnic cleansing", urging citizens to rise and defend themselves.⁹⁶ The army rejected the accusation and launched an internal investigation that reported it found no evidence of collusion or other wrongdoing.⁹⁷ A senior Adamawa state government official claimed that report lacked credibility, as "the army made itself the judge in its own case".⁹⁸ In effect, the army's public image – or at least that of local units – is being impaired by the conflict.

⁹³ One of the largest northern Christian denominations, the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria – better known in Hausa as Tarayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nijeriya – said the "skewed appointments are responsible for the increasing level of Fulani herdsmen terrorism in the country and calls for a deliberate balancing on these appointments". Communique issued at end of 63rd General Assembly in Akwanga, Nasarawa state, January 2018. The pan-Yoruba group, Afenifere, said retaining the security chiefs suggests that "there is a script to decimate some sections of the country by concentrating its security in the hands of some people from one section of the country". "Sack service chiefs now – Afenifere, Ohaneze tell Buhari", *Sunday Telegraph*, 21 January 2018.

⁹⁴ "Herdsman attacks in Adamawa: Esau's hands, Jacob's voice?", *Saturday Sun*, 3 February 2018.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, retired air force officer from Adamawa state, Abuja, 17 July 2018. In March 2018, six Bachama communities announced they would take the Nigerian Air Force before the International Criminal Court over its bombings. "Air raid – Adamawa communities vow to drag Nigerian Air Force to ICC for alleged killings", *Premium Times*, 11 March 2018. See also "On NAF human rights abuse in Numan state", *Daily Trust*, 2 February 2018.

⁹⁶ Danjuma was army chief from 1976 to 1979 and defence minister from 1999 to 2003. He is Jukun, one of the ethnic groups in conflict with the Fulani in Taraba state. Speaking at Taraba State University, Jalingo, on 24 March 2018, he said: "The armed forces are not neutral. They collude. They collude. They collude with the armed bandits that kill people, kill Nigerians. They facilitate their movement, they cover them. If you are depending on the armed forces to stop the killings, you will all die, one by one. The ethnic cleansing must stop in Taraba state, must stop in all the states of Nigeria. Otherwise, Somalia will be child's play. I ask every one of you to be alert and defend your country, defend your territory, defend your state. You have nowhere else to go". "Military colluding with armed bandits – TY Danjuma", *Daily Trust*, 25 March 2018.

⁹⁷ "Call to arms: Army, defence minister take on TY Danjuma", *Vanguard*, 26 March 2018; "Army sets up committee to probe Gen. Danjuma's allegation", News Agency of Nigeria, 9 April 2018.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior official of Adamawa state government, Abuja, 19 July 2018.

VI. The Federal Government's Response

The federal government has adopted measures in response to the escalating violence. These range from consultations between senior federal officials and administrators and residents of affected states to the deployment of additional police and military forces, the prosecution of those responsible for violence, schemes for “cattle colonies”, or clusters of ranches with services for herders and, most recently, a National Livestock Transformation Plan.

A. Consultative Responses

Federal government officials – including Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, Interior Minister Abdulrahman Dambazau and, belatedly, President Buhari – have undertaken fact-finding and consolation visits to conflict zones, but these trips have produced little effective preventive or deterrent action. Buhari and other senior federal officials have convened several consultations on ending the violence.⁹⁹ On 18 January, the National Economic Council constituted a ten-person working committee, headed by Osinbajo. Its mandate includes stopping the killings, addressing impunity and facilitating the government's long-term plan to resolve the herder-farmer resource contest.¹⁰⁰

The committee has recommended enhanced military deployments in the worst-affected states and comprehensive dialogue with all parties involved in the conflict. In February and March, a subcommittee on dialogue, headed by Ebonyi state Governor David Umahi, with the governors of Adamawa, Benue, Plateau and Taraba states as members, visited Adamawa, Benue, Taraba and Zamfara states, consulted with various parties and submitted a report to the National Economic Council.¹⁰¹ Respond-

⁹⁹ Since December 2017, consultations have been convened mostly by President Buhari, Vice President Osinbajo, Interior Minister Dambazau, Agriculture Minister Audu Innocent Ogbah and Inspector-General of Police Idris. Responding to the killings in Adamawa state, Osinbajo met with prominent Fulani leaders in Abuja on 11 December 2017, and with traditional Bachama and Batta rulers on 30 January 2018. The Fulani leaders included the Lamido of Adamawa, Muhammadu Barkindo Aliyu Musdafa; the emir of Kano, Muhammadu Sanusi II, and an influential former federal permanent secretary, Ahmed Joda. The Bachama and Batta traditional rulers included His Royal Highness Hama Bachama Homun Honest Irmiya Stephen and His Royal Highness Hama Batta Homun Alhamdu Teneke. In the wake of the killings in Benue state, Buhari met with Governor Ortom on 9 January, pledging to protect farmers and herders alike. Through the second week of January, Dambazau and Idris also consulted with federal and state agriculture and security officials, as well as community and religious leaders from the affected states. On 15 January, Buhari hosted Benue state political and ethnic leaders and urged them to restrain their people and, “in the name of God”, to accommodate their herder countrymen. “Buhari: Perpetrators of Benue violence won't escape justice”, *Daily Trust*, 16 January 2018.

¹⁰⁰ The governors of Kaduna, Zamfara, Taraba, Benue, Adamawa, Edo, Plateau, Oyo and Ebonyi state are members. It is not clear why the initiative came from the National Economic Council and not the Council of State, which has the mandate to “advise the President whenever requested to do so on the maintenance of public order within the Federation or any part thereof”. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, Third Schedule, Parts 1B and 1H.

¹⁰¹ “Killings: Osinbajo panel to engage stakeholders”, *Daily Trust*, 2 February 2018.

ing to public pressure, Buhari has also journeyed to some of the hardest-hit states, urging an end to violence.¹⁰²

These gestures are an improvement upon the seeming aloofness of the past, but their outcome is unclear. It remains to be seen whether the Osinbajo committee's submissions will make a difference. In failing to stop the killings, the government is widely viewed not so much as lacking in ideas but as insufficiently determined to put them into practice. Furthermore, consultations, however welcome, cannot be a substitute for concrete steps to end impunity.

B. *Security and Judicial Responses*

The government has also stepped up its security response. It has deployed more police and military units to the troubled states. In November 2017, the inspector-general of police, Ibrahim Idris, sent five mobile police (anti-riot) units to Adamawa state in order to prevent further clashes.¹⁰³ Following the 1 January attacks in Benue state, he also dispatched 663 additional personnel to support existing units in the affected areas.¹⁰⁴ He subsequently assigned five additional mobile police units to Nasarawa state.¹⁰⁵ On 9 January, President Buhari ordered Idris to relocate to Benue state and remain there until the killings stopped – the police chief spent two days in the state and left.¹⁰⁶

The army has also deployed more troops. On 7 February, it announced what it called a “training exercise”, Cat Race, which it said would “dovetail with real-time operations” aimed at curbing conflict and criminality in Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger and Kaduna states. The exercise ran from 15 February to 31 March and was followed by Operation Whirl Stroke 1, deployed in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states, which continues today.¹⁰⁷ The air force has also established new stations and deployed more assets, including 1,300 personnel and two Mi-35 helicopter gunships, to the region. On 19 June, the Whirl Stroke 1 force commander, Major General Adeyemi Yekini, reported that troops supported by the air force's helicopter gunships had carried out two major operations (code-named Deadly Strike and Dark

¹⁰² Buhari visited Taraba state on 5 March, Plateau state on 8-9 March and Benue state on 12 March 2018.

¹⁰³ “Adamawa killings: Force HQ to dispatch 5 Mobile Police Units – IGP”, *Leadership*, 26 November 2017.

¹⁰⁴ The new deployments are from the anti-riot Police Mobile Force, Police Special Forces, counter-terrorism units, conventional policemen, officers from the Police Explosive Ordinance Department, Special Police Joint Intelligence and Investigation Teams, and Police Aerial Surveillance Teams (Police Helicopters). On 5 February, the police commissioner in Benue state, Fatai Owoseni, reported that police headquarters had deployed fifteen additional units, including special forces as well as technical and intelligence teams, to support officers on ground. “IGP deploys 15 additional police units in Benue”, *Premium Times*, 5 February 2018.

¹⁰⁵ “IGP's relocation: The issues, arguments and harvests”, *Leadership*, 17 January 2018.

¹⁰⁶ “Herdsmen crisis: Buhari orders IGP Idris move to Benue”, *The Nation*, 9 January 2018. The police chief spent 10-12 January in the state, then delegated authority to Joshak Habila, the deputy inspector general (operations), and left. During his visit to the state, Buhari said he never knew the police chief had disobeyed his order.

¹⁰⁷ A similar operation called Whirl Stroke 2 is deployed to fight bandits in Zamfara and Kaduna states.

Down) against armed militias in Benue and Nasarawa states, including a raid on about 40 “herdsmen”, some armed with AK-47 rifles, camped at Kwantan Gyemi on the boundary between the two states.¹⁰⁸

These deployments signal, at least in principle, a more robust response to the conflict.¹⁰⁹ But they have produced mixed results at best. They have curbed violence and repelled invading militias in certain areas, enabling some of the displaced in Benue state to return to their villages.¹¹⁰ Yet killings continue; many sacked communities remain deserted, and thousands of displaced are barred from returning home, as security forces say they cannot yet guarantee the villages' security. Several factors account for the limited effectiveness of the enhanced deployments. The personnel are still inadequate to secure many areas, and units are ill equipped to respond speedily to distress calls from remote villages.¹¹¹ Some police units deployed in rural areas are operating cautiously, mindful that officers have been ambushed and killed.¹¹² In many areas, the forces deployed are inadequate to deter heavily armed militias who attack villages at night and retreat to their forest camps before dawn.

The police have made some effort to collect or confiscate illegal arms. On 21 February Idris ordered the public to surrender all illicit firearms during the 21 days from 22 February to 15 March.¹¹³ The police reported about 4,000 firearms surrendered or recovered countrywide.¹¹⁴ But this total included only 453 firearms from the six states hardest-hit by farmer-herder violence.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the exercise did not disarm the groups responsible for the killings.¹¹⁶

The government has arrested and started prosecuting some attackers. In early February, the police reported the arrest of 145 people suspected of involvement in killings, 120 of which would be put on trial. Many more have been arrested in connection with various attacks since then, notably including the head of the Benue Livestock Guards, Aliyu Teshaku, held by the army on 27 April.¹¹⁷ These are welcome,

¹⁰⁸ “Operation Whirl Stroke records success in Benue”, *Daily Trust*, 20 June 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Some argue it was overdue, when compared to the military's deployment to other trouble spots.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, Benue state Ministry of Information and Orientation official, 24 July 2018. On 24 July, the Plateau state government set up a committee to work out modalities for returning some of the displaced persons to their home communities. “Plateau sets up committee on return of IDPs to their homes”, *The Guardian*, 25 July 2018. It is uncertain how soon that process will start, as many of the displaced still consider their home communities unsafe.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, police officer, Makurdi, 17 January 2018; military officer, 20 June 2018. The officer said certain units still had fewer than ten policemen, who would be easily overwhelmed by scores of attackers.

¹¹² From January to April 2018, at least fifteen policemen were killed in ambushes in Benue state.

¹¹³ As the initial 14 March deadline for submission of arms expired, the police chief extended the operation until 30 April 2018.

¹¹⁴ “Police recover 2,753 illegal firearms from 13 states”, *The Nation*, 10 April 2018.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* The official police breakdown is: 46 from Benue, 70 from Kaduna, 35 from Nasarawa, 56 from Taraba, 67 from Kogi, 14 from Adamawa and 171 from Plateau.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, civil society leader, Jalingo, Taraba state, 14 April 2018.

¹¹⁷ Some Benue activists denounced the arrest as persecution by federal authorities piqued by his role in enforcing the state's anti-grazing law, but the Fulani herders group MACBAN had long accused Teshaku of masterminding attacks on herders and other Fulani and Hausa in Benue state. Arresting him, the army alleged he was a Boko Haram member involved in the 3 April 2018 attack on a Catholic church in Benue state, in which two priests and about seventeen worshippers were

if small, steps toward tackling impunity. That said, given the snail's pace at which investigations and prosecutions are usually conducted, it is not clear how soon those responsible may be sanctioned. Failure to convict and punish the perpetrators of these and other noteworthy killings will likely feed the cycle of violence, deepening both the anger of the affected communities and the sense that people can get away with murder.

The government's security response appears constrained or indeed hampered by contradictory diagnoses of the challenge. For instance, following the killing of over 80 people in the early January attacks in Benue state, Defence Minister Mansur Dan-Ali said the attacks were linked to the blockage of longstanding herding routes and the enactment of anti-grazing laws.¹¹⁸ In contrast, the domestic intelligence agency, the Department of State Services, reportedly assessed – erroneously and unhelpfully – the attacks could be the handiwork of Islamic State in West Africa Province fighters who had infiltrated central and southern parts of the country.¹¹⁹ Police chief Idris has said at some times that the Benue killers were “hoodlums” and “miscreants” but at others that the escalated killings were triggered by anti-grazing laws.¹²⁰

During Buhari's meeting with Benue leaders, on 16 January, he urged them to accommodate their herder countrymen, implying the conflict was escalated by the exclusionary grazing bans; he subsequently said the killers were fighters trained by the late Libyan leader, Muammar al-Qadhafi, who were now streaming across the Sahel to West Africa; and more recently charged that the killings are sponsored by opposition politicians seeking to blackmail him and discredit his government ahead of the 2019 elections.¹²¹ These contradictory theories suggest, at best, incoherence within the security system.

C. *From Cattle Colonies to National Livestock Transformation Plan*

As a long-term solution, the government, in January 2018, announced a new plan to establish “cattle colonies” across the country. According to Agriculture Minister Audu Innocent Ogbah, each colony was to cover 5,000 hectares (about 25km by 20km) and would be a cluster of ranches, with resources and facilities including grass, water, veterinary services, mills for converting agro-waste to livestock feed, schools, hospitals and markets, all secured by agro-rangers.¹²² States were expected to provide land and the federal government would bear development and maintenance costs – possibly with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organiza-

killed. “Governor Ortom speaks as army arrests aide for ‘masterminding’ Benue killings”, *Premium Times*, 28 April 2018.

¹¹⁸ “Anti-open grazing law behind farmers, herders clashes – FG”, *Daily Trust*, 26 January 2018.

¹¹⁹ “Islamic state terrorists behind Benue killings – Security chiefs”, *Daily Trust*, 22 January 2018.

¹²⁰ “IGP's relocation to Benue: The issues, arguments and harvests”, *Leadership*, 17 January 2018.

¹²¹ “Gadafi trained men behind herdsmen/farmers clashes”, *Nigerian Tribune*, 12 April 2018; “Desperate politicians behind Plateau killings – Buhari”, *Daily Trust*, 25 June 2018; “Opposition blackmailing me with herdsmen-farmers clashes – Buhari”, *Vanguard*, 11 July 2018.

¹²² “Ogbah defines cattle colonies, ranches, as panacea to farmers-herders crisis”, *Daily Trust*, 14 January 2018; “Cattle colonies: How FG plans to end farmers-herders clash”, *Daily Trust*, 28 January 2018.

tion, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and others. Ranchers and herders were to pay “a small fee”.¹²³ The government argued that benefits would include protection from cattle rustlers, fewer farmer-herder disputes, healthier stock, higher meat and dairy production, and more revenue for state governments.¹²⁴

Reactions varied. According to Ogbah, sixteen states, mostly from the North West and North East, endorsed the plan and promised to allocate land.¹²⁵ These are states with large land masses, lower population densities and well-established pastoralist populations. In some North Central states, like Kogi, Kaduna and Kwara, the governors' acceptance of the proposal met resistance from the so-called indigenous ethnic groups, largely farmers.¹²⁶ Elsewhere in the Middle Belt and much of the south, the “cattle colonies” proposal has prompted criticism from or outright rejection by state governments, ethnic pressure groups and other civil society organisations, on at least five counts.¹²⁷

First, many considered the name provocative. To many Nigerians' ears, the term “colony” connotes an administrative space acquired not through negotiation and with indigenes' consent but by force, conjuring memories of British imperial conquest. As narratives of “Fulani colonisation” already aggravate the farmer-herder problem and passions still run high over the Benue killings, the government's adoption of the term was ill advised.

A second objection concerned the government's subsidies for livestock production. Critics contended that some cattle owners were millionaires who should be able to establish ranches without such subsidies. They asserted that the government had introduced no special schemes for crop farmers so should not do so for cattle owners and herders. This argument was inaccurate: over the years, successive governments have rolled out programs to help farmers.¹²⁸ In principle, therefore, there was nothing new or wrong in a federal government plan for supporting livestock producers. A related objection centred on the nature of support to be offered. Opponents of the proposal argued that the government's assistance to farmers had been largely in the form of movable capital and services, rather than land, which is a fixed asset. They urged that if the government was to assist cattle dealers and herders, it should offer

¹²³ “Cattle colonies: How FG plans to end farmers-herders clash”, *Daily Trust*, 28 January 2018.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ “States to commence cattle colonies next week – FG”, *Daily Trust*, 20 January 2018. Katsina state, for instance, said it had already offered 5,300 hectares for its cattle colony. “Katsina provides 5,300 hectares for cattle colony”, *Vanguard*, 26 January 2018.

¹²⁶ In Kogi state, for instance, the majority Igala and the Okun said they would cede no land for the project in any of the eight local government areas occupied by their people. “Igala Nation, others, tackle Gov Bello on proposed cattle colony”, *Independent*, 21 January 2018. A Southern Kaduna senator, Danjuma Lar, said the 32,000 hectares the northern region government apportioned for the Laguda Grazing Reserve decades ago, expanded to 72,000 hectares by the present state administration, was already far more than the 5,000 hectares required for the cattle colonies. “Southern Kaduna rejects cattle colonies, says it'll create problems”, *Nigerian Pilot*, 25 January 2018. In Kwara state, the Kwara South Consultative Forum opposed the idea, vowing that no land in the Yoruba-speaking Kwara South Senatorial District would be available for a cattle colony. “Kwara South leaders reject cattle colony”, *New Telegraph*, 5 February 2018.

¹²⁷ “Cattle colonies: Southern states shun FG's request for land”, *The Punch*, 23 January 2018.

¹²⁸ These include the 1960s farm settlement schemes, the 1970s Agricultural Development Programmes and the present administration's Anchor Programme.

interest-free loans, free veterinary services or herd improvement programs, but leave herders to acquire land only with locals' permission.¹²⁹

A third concern centred on the availability of land. Some state governments, including those of Benue, Taraba, Ekiti and Abia, emphasised they have no land to spare. Indeed, given already high population densities and pressure on farmland due to the widespread practice of allowing land to lie fallow in order to improve its yield, it was doubtful that any southern state could afford to allocate 5,000 hectares for a cattle colony, either practically or politically. Establishing the colonies amid farms that lack sufficient land for their crops risked creating more problems.

Fourthly, many farmers in the Middle Belt and southern zones viewed the proposal as an indirect attempt by the federal government to take their ancestral land and hand it over to Fulani herders at their expense. The government rejected that accusation and insisted that Nigerians of all ethnic groups were welcome to establish ranches. But many opponents of cattle colonies remained unconvinced. Some argued that colonies would eventually become "mini-states within states" with implications for demography and local culture.¹³⁰

The last objection was that the cattle colonies would not solve the problem of open grazing, since it would be voluntary for herders to move into them and, more to the point, many herders are foreign transhumant migrants. Many are citizens of other West and Central African countries; they come to Nigeria in search of pasture during the dry season and leave when the rains begin. They may have little interest in settling in Nigeria, where they would be required to pay for cattle feed, water and use of amenities. Thus, while the colonies could reduce indiscriminate grazing, they would not eliminate it.

As the colonies' critics waited for the government to address their concerns, Agriculture Minister Ogburn on 19 June announced yet another policy initiative, a National Livestock Transformation Plan aimed at encouraging a more gradual switch from open grazing to ranching.¹³¹ "Open grazing is no longer viable; that's why we're switching to ranching", he said. The plan, running from 2018 to 2027, is a multifaceted intervention intended to modernise livestock management, improve productivity and enhance security.

Under the new plan, ten states – Adamawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara – have been selected as the pilot states, with 94 ranches to be established in clusters of four at 24 locations spread over those states. To participate in the plan, cattle herders are expected to organise and register as cooperatives that will then be able to rent land from state governments and also benefit from loans, grants and subsidies. The federal and state governments are expected to provide a total of 70 billion nairas (about \$195 million) for the pilot phase, spanning three years, while private interests are expected to invest in excess of 100 billion nairas (about \$278 million) between the fourth and tenth years.

The plan is a laudable effort at resolving the farmer-herder conflict, but like earlier initiatives, it has drawn mixed responses. The major herders' and farmers' associations, MACBAN and the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), respectively,

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, member of Niger state house of representatives, Abuja, 5 February 2018.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, human rights activist, Abuja, 21 January 2018.

¹³¹ "Fed Govt to build 94 ranches in 10 states", *The Nation*, 20 June 2018

have cautiously welcomed it.¹³² Saleh Alhassan, the MAKH national secretary, said, “we are fully in support of this policy”, but added that “if we want to completely transform from open grazing to highly mechanised form of livestock production, which is ranching, we need a period of not less than 25 years”.¹³³ But some of the states designated for the start-up phase, including Ebonyi and Edo in the south and Benue in the Middle Belt, again reject inclusion in the project.¹³⁴ They argue that they lack sufficient land for ranches, but their opposition is more fundamentally driven by fears that allowing Fulani groups to settle in their midst risks further conflicts in the future. The federal government will have to address these fears in order to overcome resistance in the opposing states.

¹³² “Farmers, herders hail FG over ranches in 10 states”, *Daily Trust*, 21 June 2018.

¹³³ “Nigerians won’t be able to afford beef if we stop open grazing now”, *Saturday Punch*, 7 July 2018.

¹³⁴ “Ebonyi kicks against FG’s ranching programme”, *Daily Trust*, 22 June 2018; “We’ve no land for FG’s ranches – Benue stakeholders”, *Vanguard*, 23 June 2018; “Benue tribal leaders reject FG’s N179 bn cattle ranches project”, *Vanguard*, 22 June 2018; “We’ll resist ceding land for cattle ranching – BNC”, *Vanguard*, 12 July 2018.

VII. Immediate Priorities

To end the farmer-herder killings, the federal government needs to demonstrate more decisive leadership, notably by further improving security, tackling impunity head-on and pressing states to suspend enforcement of open grazing bans until herders' objections are properly addressed. It also should expedite rollout of the National Livestock Transformation Plan.

A. *Improve Security and End Impunity*

Four measures are crucial for quickly improving security arrangements. First is to boost the numbers of security personnel, particularly in the most vulnerable areas of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states. In the short term, some of the soldiers currently engaged in policing duties in the South East and South West should be redeployed to the troubled states; the large numbers of police personnel still guarding politicians and other privileged elite in Abuja and state capitals should also be reassigned to these areas.

The federal government should further provide the army and police units deployed to these states with additional logistics support, including more patrol vehicles and especially more motorcycles for moving through difficult terrain and reaching remote communities. Security services must also improve on their ability to gather intelligence and predict attacks, including through closer engagement and communication with local residents. Moreover, the police should put to better use information gleaned from interrogations of arrested armed group members to apprehend and disarm militias camped deep in forests.

Second are steps to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. President Buhari has pledged repeatedly that those responsible for the killings will be arrested and prosecuted. But as Crisis Group argued last year, the government needs to ensure that both herders and farmers responsible for violence are held to account, transparently and even-handedly.

The government should set up an independent high-level commission to investigate all major cases of farmer-herder violence that occurred since it assumed office in 2015 – including those in the Mambilla plateau, Numan, Kajuru, Nimbo, Agatu and southern Kaduna. This commission should make recommendations on how to hold to account not only the killers but also any individual or group found to have sponsored or been complicit in the atrocities. Investigators should also address allegations of military complacency and connivance, and recommend sanctions for any officers or rank-and-file soldiers found to have acted unprofessionally.

For persons already arrested and others who may be indicted by the commission, the government should make special arrangements to expedite trials, provide justice for victims and send a strong signal against impunity. Leaving cases to the slow-grinding judiciary without special steps to speed up trials will mean long delays, deepening grievances and the risk of further violence.

The third priority is the disarmament of militias and vigilantes. Security agencies need a comprehensive disarmament program. On 22 February, the police issued an order for all illegal weapons countrywide to be surrendered by 15 March. Given that most armed groups did not comply with this directive, the police and other security

agencies should step up efforts to identify and arrest illegal arms producers and dealers. With the aid of informants, they also should detect and seize illegal stockpiles in remote areas. The customs and immigration services should scale up their monitoring of Nigeria's land borders, to curb the inflow of illicit firearms and mercenaries. Security services should also liaise more closely with locals to persuade militias to disarm. Such persuasion, however, will yield results only when the government institutes policies that assure the armed groups and communities that support them that their interests are being addressed and that their security will be protected.

B. *Soften Anti-grazing Laws*

The Benue state government should freeze and review its open grazing ban, as Taraba state has done. In enacting the ban, it acted in accordance with its constitutional prerogatives and in the interest of the majority of its people. But given cattle owners' and herders' objections, it should apply such laws in a manner that does not aggravate existing tensions or create new problems.

Following Taraba's example, the Benue state government should suspend enforcement of its anti-grazing law, amend the provisions to accommodate herders' interests and encourage a phased transition to ranching. In reviewing provisions of the laws that herders find noxious, it should particularly address those relating to land acquisition, allowing for longer leases rather than requiring annual lease renewal. It should clarify the administrative procedures for obtaining credit, getting ranch management training and entering into private-public partnerships, in order to encourage investors to establish ranches. It also should establish pilot ranches in at least three zones, in order to demonstrate to herders how such projects would work to their benefit. It should carry out herder sensitisation campaigns explaining the new law, as well as the incentives for moving to ranching. Where possible, it should lend greater support to herder-farmer dialogues at local or community levels.

C. *Encourage Herder-Farmer Dialogue and Support Local Peace Accords*

Dialogue between herders and farmers, particularly at the local level, is crucial to ending the violence. In some states, governments have established structures that could facilitate such dialogue. These include the Committee on Reconciliation and Development of Gazetted Grazing Reserves in Adamawa state, the Peace Agency in Plateau state and the multi-level conflict resolution committees in Nasarawa state, whose establishment was formalised on 27 June.¹³⁵ State governments should strengthen these structures to ensure sustained engagement with, and effective mediation between, the parties in conflict.

There are hopeful new initiatives as well. On 12 July, AFAN and MACBAN leaders met in Abuja and agreed to collaborate to ensure peaceful coexistence among their members countrywide.¹³⁶ In furtherance of the agreement, they formed a fourteen-person joint committee to recommend strategies for ending violence and

¹³⁵ The Nasarawa state committees are established at state, local government, development area, district and village levels.

¹³⁶ "Farmers, Miyetti Allah issue joint resolution on crisis", *Daily Trust*, 13 July 2018.

building peace between the two groups. On 21 July, leaders of the Yandang and four other ethnic groups in Lau local government area of Taraba state signed a peace accord with the Fulani, agreeing to immediately withdraw all militias, jointly comb troubled areas and arrest any person(s) found with arms, and set up a peace and reconciliation committee.¹³⁷ These initiatives are still very fragile, endangered by mutual distrust. They need to be supported by federal, state and local governments, and security agencies, as well as non-governmental organisations with expertise in grassroots conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

D. Implement the National Livestock Transformation Plan

The National Livestock Transformation Plan is the first step on a long road strewn with obstacles. The report of the National Conference on the Nigerian Livestock Industry, held in Abuja in September 2017 and submitted to the agriculture minister in January 2018, details the challenges: gaining access to land; encouraging livestock owners to form cooperatives and clusters; ensuring availability of livestock feed via commercial pasture and fodder production; developing a program to raise more profitable livestock breeds; providing credit to ranchers at single-digit interest rates; and developing infrastructure such as extension services, disease control and management, and ranch-to-market transportation. The new plan already reflects some of these concerns, but the government should ensure that the proposed transformation addresses all the components of the livestock sector.

In addressing these challenges, the federal government needs to secure the buy-in of cattle owners and herders countrywide. For now, while the leaders of herders' associations acknowledge the need for a phased transition from open grazing to ranching, many cattle owners consider the necessary investments daunting and herders are apprehensive about their future livelihood if open grazing peters out.

The federal and state governments should formulate realistic options for both cattle owners and the large number of herders who will be rendered redundant by the transition. Such options should include easy access to soft credit for establishing ranches, as well as training for alternative employment in the livestock production and management value chain, including in areas like growing grass and marketing it to ranchers or packaging waste from rice mills and selling it as cattle feed. The Niger state government's recent initiative to found skill acquisition programs for Fulani youth, as part of efforts to reduce farmer-herder clashes and juvenile crime should be of interest.¹³⁸ The government also should commit more vigorously to the nomadic education program, now over three decades old, which was, among other goals, to give pastoralist youth the basic education necessary for alternative employment.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ "5 Taraba ethnic groups sign peace accord with Fulani", *Daily Trust*, 23 July 2018.

¹³⁸ "70 herders get employment in Niger", *Daily Trust*, 21 August 2017.

¹³⁹ The Nomadic Education Program, established by the federal government in 1986 and which started operation in 1989, was designed to promote the education of pastoralist children and facilitate their integration into mainstream development. It has been poorly implemented over the years: as of 2014, the National Commission for Nomadic Education reported that of about four million children of pastoralists only about 500,000, or 13 per cent, were enrolled in the program.

Furthermore, as some of the ten states designated for ranch establishment under the plan have backed out, the federal government should start with only consenting states, while addressing others' concerns and persuading them to rethink their objections. Establishing ranches in any state without securing local consent could sow the seeds of future conflicts. The government should also seek expertise from international development agencies and countries that have more developed live-stock sectors.

As Crisis Group has recommended in the past, the federal government also needs to step up efforts to address the root causes of disruption in the livestock industry. Most important are measures to combat desertification and environmental degradation in the arid and semi-arid north, and to better regulate transhumant migration in consonance with international protocols to which Nigeria is a signatory.¹⁴⁰

E. *Strengthen International Engagement*

The need for action by Nigeria's international partners is growing. As early as October 2017, the Benue state house of assembly called international attention to the deteriorating security in the state. Clearly, violence has worsened considerably since then. Nigeria's international friends, notably the diplomatic missions of the United States, United Kingdom, European Union and Canada in Abuja, should nudge President Buhari to act more decisively and transparently to end the killings. International human rights groups, some of whom have already raised concerns about the nature and scale of atrocities, should sustain demands for better protection of communities and an end to impunity.¹⁴¹ Humanitarian organisations, focused largely on the North East, should devote resources to IDPs in camps and communities in Benue and Nasarawa states. Most importantly, international development agencies, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, World Bank and African Development Bank, should offer the Nigerian authorities advice and technical support to ensure smooth, sustainable livestock sector reform.

¹⁴⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Herders against Farmers*, op. cit.

¹⁴¹ Some farmers repeatedly say they feel abandoned by Western governments and international human rights groups, asserting that is because they have no oil like the Niger Delta and the conflict poses no jihadist threat like the Boko Haram crisis. Crisis Group interviews, community and civil society leaders, Makurdi, Benue state, January 2018, and Abuja, June 2018.

VIII. Conclusion

The farmer-herder conflict has arguably become the greatest threat to Nigeria's peace and security. It is exacting an ever-deadlier toll and, with elections looming in 2019, could destabilise the country if the government and other actors fail to contain it. Without measures ranging from immediate dialogue between affected communities to long-term livestock sector reform, the conflict risks escalating. President Buhari and the federal government must redouble efforts to check the violence, the drift of many young men toward ethnic militancy, the proliferation of assault weapons and the entrenchment of impunity. Those states enacting anti-open grazing policies should see herders not as unwanted intruders, but as a crucial link in the food security chain.

For their part, herders' organisations must accept that the old frameworks of farmer-herder relations and conflict resolution are no longer workable and that a transition to ranching is, over time, likely inevitable. They should discourage members from taking the law into their own hands, and instead urge them to channel their grievances through the appropriate authorities or seek redress in court. They should work closely with security agencies to identify groups responsible for attacks and killings. The transition from open grazing to ranching, which involves giving up traditions developed over many centuries of pastoralism, will not be easy. But it is not impossible – and not without benefits. The leaders of herders' groups should endeavour to persuade their members to embrace ranching or related alternative vocations.

As religious and ethnic divisions complicate the conflict, communal leaders need to weigh in more constructively. In particular, they should take a strong stand against retaliatory violence and encourage peaceful solutions. Civil society organisations must also step up efforts, especially by encouraging dialogue, to break the cycle of reprisal killings.

Today's agrarian-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria is grounded in environmental and political transformations long in the making. The emergency measures recommended above would help the federal government and others prevent herder-farmer clashes from spiralling out of control. But the socio-economic evolution necessary to cope with these changes – involving herders gradually giving up their traditional pastoralism and moving to ranching – will likely take many years. With careful management and sensitivity to the interests of all those affected by the conflict from Nigerian authorities and community leaders, that transition need not be perilous to national stability or cost Nigerians, whether herders or farmers, their lives.

Abuja/Dakar/Brussels, 26 July 2018

Appendix A: Map of Nigeria



Map No. 4228 Rev. 1 UNITED NATIONS
August 2014

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Appendix B: List of Acronyms

AFAN	All Farmers Association of Nigeria
APC	All Progressives Congress
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
JAFUYAN	Jonde Jam Fulani Youth Association of Nigeria
MACBAN	Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria
MAFO	Movement Against Fulani Occupation
MAKH	Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore
NSCIA	National Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs
PDP	People's Democratic Party

Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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