

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: NGA23766
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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

- 1. Please provide information on the people of Yelwa in Plateau State.**
- 2. What is the predominant religion and tribal group?**
- 3. What is the main language?**
- 4. Please provide any information on a conflict between the local people in Yelwa or Plateau State and the Muslims in Nassarawa State.**
- 5. Does Nassarawa State have a predominantly Muslim population?**
- 6. Is there any record of an attack on Yelwa by Muslims or of any targeting of Yelwa residents by Muslims?**
- 7. If so, please provide details.**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information on the people of Yelwa in Plateau State.**
- 2. What is the predominant religion and tribal group?**

A RRT research response dated 26 October 2005 lists documents regarding Yelwa in Plateau State (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response NGA23762*, 26 October – Attachment 1). These include a Human Rights Watch report dated May 2005, which provides information in relation to the people, religion and tribal groups of Yelwa. It is stated in the report that:

Yelwa is a market town located in the southern part of Plateau State. As it is an important commercial center, people from different ethnic groups have settled there over the years. However, the majority of Yelwa's residents are Muslim. Yelwa is under the administrative control of Shendam local government area, which has its headquarters in the town of Shendam, about 20 kilometers away. Shendam, which is roughly the same size as Yelwa, is a predominantly Christian town and the residents of the villages in the surrounding area are also predominantly Christian. Most local government officials and traditional leaders in Shendam are Christian...

The disputes in Yelwa and Shendam have involved several ethnic groups. The principal protagonists in the conflict have been the Gamai, the majority ethnic group in Shendam local government area, and the Jarawa...

The Gamai, who include both Christians and Muslims, consider themselves to be “indigenes” and regard the Jarawa as “settlers”. The Jarawa, who are predominantly Muslim, claim to be the original founders of Yelwa.

The report also mentions the comments of a member of a non-governmental organisation that “Yelwa includes lots of tribes” (Human Rights Watch 2005, *Revenge in the Name of Religion – The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States*, Vol. 17, No. 8 (A), May, pp 10-11, 20-21 – Attachment 2).

An article dated 7 May 2004 on the IRINnews.org website indicates that Muslims attacked in Yelwa by “militiamen from the mainly Christian Tarok ethnic group” in May 2004 “were mainly members of the Hausa and Fulani tribes.” According to the article, the Hausa and Fulani, who had migrated into the area from the north of Nigeria over the past century, “constituted a minority of the town’s 10,000 population.” It is stated in the article that:

The Tarok are farmers from Plateau state who are mostly Christian and Animist. Those they attacked in Yelwa were mainly Hausa and Fulani nomadic herdsman and itinerant traders who have migrated into region from northern Nigeria over the past century. These northerners constituted a minority of the town's 10,000 population (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, ‘Nigeria: Muslim death toll in raid on Yelwa tops 600 – Red Cross’, IRINnews.org website, 7 May http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40952&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGERIA – Accessed 24 November 2005 – Attachment 3).

However, another article dated 10 May 2004 on the IRINnews.org website describes Yelwa as being “mainly Muslim” (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, ‘Nigeria: Red Cross cares for 7,500 displaced by latest Plateau violence’, IRINnews.org website, 10 May http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40976&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGERIA – Accessed 24 November 2005 – Attachment 4).

An article dated 5 May 2004 refers to Yelwa as “a farming community in the Shendam local government area of central Nigeria's Plateau State, 300 km (185 miles) east of Abuja.” The article indicates that the town was a “mainly Muslim Hausa-speaking community” (‘Nigerian Muslims say up to 250 killed, 120 missing in attack by Christians’ 2004, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: AFP news agency, 5 May – Attachment 5).

3. What is the main language?

The Human Rights Watch report dated May 2005, when referring to what had occurred in Yelwa, notes that the Hausa language was “spoken by many ethnic groups in the area, not only those of Hausa ethnicity” (Human Rights Watch 2005, *Revenge in the Name of Religion – The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States*, Vol. 17, No. 8 (A), May, p 27 – Attachment 2).

The previously mentioned article dated 5 May 2004 mentions that Yelwa was a “mainly Muslim Hausa-speaking community” (‘Nigerian Muslims say up to 250 killed, 120 missing in

attack by Christians' 2004, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: AFP news agency, 5 May – Attachment 5).

4. Please provide any information on a conflict between the local people in Yelwa or Plateau State and the Muslims in Nassarawa State.

An article dated 21 May 2004 refers to attacks on “at least four towns” in Plateau state “by suspected Hausa/Fulani militia in the past 24 hours, with the number of persons killed during the period now 44.” According to the article, “The attackers were believed to have come into Plateau State from neighbouring Nassarawa State” (Attah, Arome 2004, ‘Hausa Militia Overruns More Towns – Kill 44 in 24 Hours’, *PM News (Nigeria)*, 21 May – Attachment 6).

An article dated 20 May 2004 indicates that Muslim militiamen had attacked the village of Sabon Gida in Plateau State on 18 May 2004, causing hundreds of Christians to subsequently flee. According to the article, “Plateau State’s police chief, Commissioner Innocent Iluozoke, told AFP that the latest attack on Sabon Gida was carried out by Muslim members of the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups who came over the border from Nassarawa State” (‘Christians flee fresh attacks by Muslim militiamen in Nigerian Plateau State’ 2004, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: AFP news agency, 20 May – Attachment 7).

Another article dated 10 May 2004 notes that following Christian-Muslim violence, Plateau state officials had “created a peace committee to network with Taraba, Benue, and Nasarawa state governments.” It is stated in the article that:

In response to the tensions, Plateau state officials have created a peace committee to network with Taraba, Benue, and Nasarawa state governments. The peace committee is seeking a viable solution to the religious conflict that has engulfed the three states in recent months.

“We have contacted Taraba, Benue and Nasarawa states to check their borders to prevent unnecessary encroachment,” Michael Botmang, deputy governor of Plateau state, told *Compass* yesterday. “On our part, we have sent enough security personnel to the borders to prevent an influx of the Muslim militants” (Minchakpu, Obed 2004, ‘Fresh violence erupts in Nigeria’, *Compass Direct*, 10 May – Attachment 8).

5. Does Nassarawa State have a predominantly Muslim population?

A Human Rights Watch report dated September 2004 indicates that Nasarawa is one of the states “where there are large Muslim populations” (Human Rights Watch 2004, “*Political Shari’a*”? *Human Rights and Islamic Law in Northern Nigeria*, Vol. 16, No. 9 (A), September – Attachment 9).

According to an article dated 20 May 2004, Nassarawa state has “a predominantly Muslim population” (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, ‘Nigeria: 20 dead in fresh Plateau violence despite state of emergency’, IRINnews.org website, 20 May http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=41162&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGERIA – Accessed 24 November 2005 – Attachment 10).

An *Agence France-Presse* article dated 22 November 2002 refers to Nassarawa as a “Muslim-majority” state (‘Facts on Nigerian states operating the Sharia Islamic law code’ 2002, *Agence France-Presse*, 22 November – Attachment 11).

However, a *Compass Direct* article dated 19 January 2001 indicates that in relation to Nasarawa state, Christians “constitute 90 percent of the state’s 1.2 million population” (Minchakpu, Obed 2001, ‘Christians and Islamic law in Nigeria; An Overview of the Situation Facing the Church in Northern Nigeria’, *Compass Direct*, 19 January – Attachment 12).

6. Is there any record of an attack on Yelwa by Muslims or of any targeting of Yelwa residents by Muslims?

7. If so, please provide details.

The Human Rights Watch report dated May 2005 indicates that witnesses had “described three major outbreaks of violence in Yelwa town: the first on June 26, 2002, the second on February 24, 2004, and the third on May 2-3, 2004. All three incidents involved deliberate attacks. In all three cases, the victims included both Christians and Muslims. However, the majority of victims in the February 24, 2004 attack were Christians, while the majority of victims in the May 2004 attack were Muslims.” The report also notes that during “the periods between these attacks, particularly between late February and early May 2004, there were numerous smaller attacks on villages in the surrounding area.” The report provides detailed accounts of the attacks on 24 February 2004 and 2-3 May 2004. In relation to the attack on 24 February 2004, the report notes that:

On February 24, at about 6.30 a.m., Yelwa was attacked. The fighting lasted until around 3 p.m. or 4 p.m. Christians claimed the attack was initiated by Muslims, while Muslims claimed it was initiated by Christians. Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm which side started the fighting, but our research indicates that the majority of victims were Christians.

According to testimonies gathered by Human Rights Watch in Yelwa, at least 78 Christians, and possibly many more, were killed in Yelwa on February 24. Several churches were destroyed, including the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) Bishara no.1 church in the new market area, Angwan Baraya, a church of the United Church of Christ in Nigeria (UCCN, or HEKAN by its Hausa acronym) on the road leading to Langtang South, and three churches of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), including one in Nshar, a village just outside Yelwa.

One of the most calculated and bloody incidents on February 24 was an attack on the compound of a church known as COCIN no.1, situated on the road leading to Langtang South... At least 48 Christians were killed inside the church compound, and around 30 others outside the compound. The victims were from various ethnic groups, including Tarok, Angas and Sayawa. The majority of victims were men, but there were also several women and at least two children, aged about ten. Human Rights Watch researchers collected the names of many of the victims killed in or near the church compound.

...A number of Muslims were also killed on February 24. The estimates provided by Muslim residents ranged from 15 to 190; Human Rights Watch has not been able to substantiate these figures.

...Police representatives in the state capital Jos told Human Rights Watch that according to the police investigations, a total of around 78 people were killed on February 24, 48 inside the COCIN church compound and about 30 in other parts of town... A local government official from Shendam claimed that 265 people were killed; this figure included about 20 people who were missing but not confirmed dead... A traditional leader in Shendam claimed that in addition to 265 killed in Yelwa and the neighboring village of Nshar, 150 were killed in the COCIN church... Human Rights Watch was not able to substantiate these higher numbers.

The report also mentions “a number of smaller attacks on predominantly Christian villages around Yelwa between February and May, mostly attributed to armed Muslims”, and that “There were also attacks by Christians against Muslims during this period.”

In relation to the attack on 2-3 May 2004, it is stated in the report that:

On May 2, Yelwa was attacked again. This attack, which lasted two days, was on a larger scale than any of the previous attacks in the area. Despite claims by some Christian leaders that it was “spontaneous,” on the basis of the testimonies of eye-witnesses and residents of Yelwa, it would appear that the attack was carefully coordinated and involved not only Christian residents of the immediate area, but also Christians from other local government areas.

As in the case of some of the earlier attacks by Christians, the perpetrators were initially described as Tarok by the media and others; in reality, it was not only the Tarok but many different groups who participated in this attack... Eye-witnesses mentioned a wide range of tribes among the attackers, including the Tarok, Gamai, Montol, Angas, Kwalla, Birom, Sayawa, and Jukun. The victims were also from many different tribes, with only their religion in common: almost all of them were Muslim. A member of a non-governmental organization explained to Human Rights Watch: “Yelwa includes lots of tribes. All would have been affected by the [May 2004] violence simply by virtue of religion.”

According to the report, “The attackers specifically targeted the Muslim population of Yelwa.” Some Muslims fought back and “there was fighting between the armed Muslims and armed Christians” in some areas. The report indicates that “A number of Christians were reportedly killed. However, the Christians attackers were so numerous and well-armed that they quickly overpowered even those Muslims who had weapons.”

The report notes that:

Muslim residents of Yelwa estimate that around 660 Muslims were killed on May 2 and 3. On the basis of its own research and detailed testimonies from residents, including some who buried the bodies and others who were present as the bodies were counted, Human Rights Watch believes this figure to be credible, and that the real figure may be closer to seven hundred. These figures refer only to the Muslim deaths. The number of Christians who died over the two days is not known. Most Christians interviewed by Human Rights Watch were not able to give a precise figure of the number of casualties on their side, except for the Plateau State chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), who claimed that there had been 70 Christians among a total of 250 people killed on May 2 (Human Rights Watch 2005, *Revenge in the Name of Religion – The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States*, Vol. 17, No. 8 (A), May, pp 12, 15, 18-21, 23 – Attachment 2).

Other articles in relation to the violence in February and May 2004 include the following:

A *Compass Direct* article dated 29 July 2005 indicates that in February 2004, “Muslim militants in Yelwa town attacked Christians there – killing more than 300 believers and destroying their homes and churches. The Rev. Samson Bukar and 68 other members of his Church of Christ were killed inside their worship building” (‘Nigeria: Northern Nigerian leaders implore president to end sharia’ 2005, *Compass Direct*, 29 July – Attachment 13).

A further *Compass Direct* article dated 10 May 2004 indicates that “a pastor and 48 members of his church” were killed by Muslim militants in Yelwa on 23 February 2004. Two months later, a Muslim-Christian clash in Yelwa had “resulted in the deaths of 350 people and the

disappearance of 250 women and children, according to police reports.” The article also refers to news reports by Associated Press and Agence France Press (AFP) that “land disputes between members of the predominantly Christian Tarok tribe and Muslim Hausa-Fulani farmers sparked the violence in Yelwa. A Muslim city councilman told AFP reporters that at least 630 persons, most of them Muslims, had died in the fighting” (Minchakpu, Obed 2004, ‘Fresh violence erupts in Nigeria’, *Compass Direct*, 10 May – Attachment 8).

According to another article dated 10 May 2004 on the IRINnews.org website:

A total of 7,500 people displaced from their home’s following a murderous attack by Christian militiamen on the mainly Muslim town of Yelwa in central Nigeria have been evacuated and put in the care of the Nigerian Red Cross, officials said on Monday.

...According to the Red Cross, the attack on 2 May by men from the mainly Christian Tarok tribe resulted in the death of more than 600 people. The victims of the massacre and those who fled Yelwa afterwards were mainly people from the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups with roots in the north of the country (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, ‘Nigeria: Red Cross cares for 7,500 displaced by latest Plateau violence’, IRINnews.org website, 10 May

http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40976&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGERIA – Accessed 24 November 2005 – Attachment 4).

A Norwegian Refugee Council report dated 1 February 2005 indicates that during 2004 in Plateau state, “A bloody cycle of revenge attacks between mainly Muslim cattle herders and Christian farmers – essentially over land and cattle – over a four month period from February to May left more than 1,000 people dead and possibly up to 258,000 others internally displaced (Reuters, 4 August 2004).” The report also refers to a series of clashes in Yelwa culminating “in May 2004 in the massacre of at least 600 Muslims (according to the Nigerian Red Cross) by heavily armed Christian militia”. There were “mass graves in both the Muslim and Christian areas of the town” attesting to the “heavy losses on both sides over the four-month period.” The report also notes that both the “Muslim and Christian groups in the Yelwa area have used inflammatory language against each other”, including the Christian Gamai Unity and Development Organisation in Shendam, which “claimed in July 2004 that there was “systematic killing of Gamai and other non-Muslim returnees and travellers by the Muslim elements in Yelwa.”” The report describes the Plateau state crisis as “a prime example of ethno-religious conflict masking the “indigenes” versus “settlers” syndrome, exacerbated and manipulated by political factors” (Norwegian Refugee Council 2005, *Internal displacement in Nigeria: a hidden crisis*, 1 February, p 10 – Attachment 14).

A *Compass Direct* article dated 23 September 2005 refers to comments by the Rt Reverend Benjamin Kwashi of the Anglican Communion that in 2001, Yelwa was amongst the towns in which “Muslim extremists destroyed churches” and that “The entire archdeaconry in Yelwa was wiped out” (Minchakpu, Obed 2005, ‘Nigeria: Digging up the roots of persecution in Plateau state, Nigeria’, *Compass Direct*, 23 September – Attachment 15).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

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Irinnews.org website www.irinnews.org

BBC News website <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Amnesty International website www.amnesty.org

Human Rights Watch website www.hrw.org

Databases:		
Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, U.S. Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
UNHCR	<i>REFWORLD</i>	UNHCR Refugee Information Online
Public	<i>JANE'S</i>	Jane's Intelligence Review
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response NGA23762*, 26 October.
2. Human Rights Watch 2005, *Revenge in the Name of Religion – The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States*, Vol. 17, No. 8 (A), May.
3. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, 'Nigeria: Muslim death toll in raid on Yelwa tops 600 – Red Cross', IRINnews.org website, 7 May.
(http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40952&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGERIA – Accessed 24 November 2005)
4. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, 'Nigeria: Red Cross cares for 7,500 displaced by latest Plateau violence', IRINnews.org website, 10 May.
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5. 'Nigerian Muslims say up to 250 killed, 120 missing in attack by Christians' 2004, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: AFP news agency, 5 May. (CISNET Nigeria CX94536)
6. Attah, Arome 2004, 'Hausa Militia Overruns More Towns – Kill 44 in 24 Hours', *PM News (Nigeria)*, 21 May. (FACTIVA)
7. 'Christians flee fresh attacks by Muslim militiamen in Nigerian Plateau State' 2004, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: AFP news agency, 20 May. (CISNET Nigeria CX95254)
8. Minchakpu, Obed 2004, 'Fresh violence erupts in Nigeria', *Compass Direct*, 10 May. (CISNET Nigeria CX94539)
9. Human Rights Watch 2004, "*Political Shari'a*"? *Human Rights and Islamic Law in Northern Nigeria*, Vol. 16, No. 9 (A), September.
10. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004, 'Nigeria: 20 dead in fresh Plateau violence despite state of emergency', IRINnews.org website, 20 May.

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11. 'Facts on Nigerian states operating the Sharia Islamic law code' 2002, *Agence France-Presse*, 22 November. (FACTIVA)
12. Minchakpu, Obed 2001, 'Christians and Islamic law in Nigeria; An Overview of the Situation Facing the Church in Northern Nigeria', *Compass Direct*, 19 January. (CISNET Nigeria CX49482)
13. 'Nigeria: Northern Nigerian leaders implore president to end sharia' 2005, *Compass Direct*, 29 July. (CISNET Nigeria CX130238)
14. Norwegian Refugee Council 2005, *Internal displacement in Nigeria: a hidden crisis*, 1 February.
15. Minchakpu, Obed 2005, 'Nigeria: Digging up the roots of persecution in Plateau state, Nigeria', *Compass Direct*, 23 September. (CISNET Nigeria CX135618)