We are facing persecution, depopulation by armed bandits

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We are facing persecution, depopulation by armed bandits – Minority Christian groups  
  
A group of Churches of minority ethnic nationalities in North Central Nigeria have alleged that they are facing persecution and depopulation by armed bandits.  
  
The churches are Universal Reformed Christian Church (NKST), Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and Christian Association of Nigeria Youth Wing (YOWICAN), Tafawa Balewa (Bauchi), Kaduna and Plateau States.  
  
“We are disturbed by the continuous killing, destruction of farmland and forceful occupation of our ancestral land in our states.  
  
“We have realised that bullets, machetes, swords don’t recognise denominational boundaries. Catholic, COCIN, ECWA, Anglican, NKST are not immune from the attacks by the jihadists. It is on this premise that we have come to speak out. Because what we are experiencing is not just insecurity.”  
  
The groups pointed out that contrary to the narrative that what has been happening in our communities is a case of two people fighting (farmers and herdsmen)…; we believe that they are coordinated and religiously motivated attacks against us the indigenous Christian Communities to forcefully take over our ancestral land and further impoverish the people.  
  
“These are a part of a broader scheme targeted at depopulating, subjugating, disenfranchising, impoverishing and silencing our people.  
  
“We have carefully observed the coordinated and systematic way and manner the attacks are carried out on our communities. This points to us that these attacks are religiously motivated. If not so, why the chants of ‘Allahu Akbar’ during such attacks? We also view it as persecution, because the targeted communities are mostly Christian communities (with women and children being most vulnerable).  
  
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“We are convinced that the word that aptly describes the reality on ground is persecution. This persecution has manifested in acts of violence such as killings, kidnap for ransom, robbery, rape, abduction, forceful conversion of Christian minors etc.”  
  
“The destruction of homes, farmlands, and other sources of livelihood has deprived our people of the sources of survival. Displacement of our people from their ancestral lands through forceful takeover and occupation of their lands.”  
  
They also alleged systemic marginalisation through the denial of opportunities within the public/civil service. Deliberate refusal to implement an already gazetted chiefdom (e.g Zaar Chiefdom) in Bauchi State is a case in point; imposition of a Muslim traditional leader on a predominantly Christian community etc.  
  
They therefore demanded the immediate return (and NOT just resettlement) of our people who have been displaced from their ancestral lands (homes). We demand that state governments in all affected states issue certificates of occupancy to all displaced persons over their ancestral lands to recognise their genuine titles.  
  
“We demand that the right of farmers to cultivate their farmlands without harassment from cattle rearers be recognised by law and protected; speedy trials for indigenous Christian youths in detention by security forces. We call on the government at all levels to always ensure the equal distribution of the commonwealth of the people irrespective of religious inclinations.”