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## NIGERIA: Women in black hold simultaneous protests against Plateau State violence

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Thousands of women dressed in black marched through the streets of Jos yesterday to mourn, pray and protest against the massacre of around 500 villagers in Jos South by Fulani Muslims on 8 March.

Carrying bibles, pictures of victims, and branches symbolizing peace, the women walked from the headquarters of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) to the Plateau State House of Assembly, where they were received by the Speaker, and on to the Governor's residence, where the Deputy Governor met with them. A simultaneous protest was held in the Nigerian capital Abuja, where hundreds of women marched to the Federal House of Assembly and were received by the Speaker, who promised to relay their concerns to both Houses.

In a communiqué entitled 'Enough is Enough', protesters condemned "the brutal killing of unsuspecting women, children and babies on the flimsiest excuse and at the slightest pretext of grievance". Amongst other things, they demanded that soldiers implicated in the extrajudicial killing of civilians should face a court martial, and requested the removal of Chief of Army Staff General Danbazzau and Major General Saleh Maina, General Officer Commanding the 3rd Armored Division, "for failure to protect innocent citizens". The communiqué also pleaded for the release of youths who were unfairly detained in connection with violence.

As sporadic attacks continue in remote areas despite military patrols and a curfew, hostility towards the army is increasing among the local population. In an indication of this, troops arriving at Kwata village on the afternoon of 9 March after its people had successfully repulsed an attack were themselves driven away by the villagers.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) said: "CSW salutes this initiative by the women of Plateau State, and urges Nigerian political leaders, and the Federal Government in particular, to thoroughly examine the concerns outlined in their communiqué, and to take action against members of the armed forces, regardless of rank, who are found to be abusing their positions by conducting arbitrary arrests or extrajudicial executions. The reported army abuses in Plateau State, and its seeming failure to provide protection for vulnerable villagers, are undermining confidence in an important national institution. We also join the women of Plateau State in their call for the release of youths spuriously detained in connection with violence. Impunity will only end when the real organizers and perpetrators are apprehended and brought to justice."