
NIGERIA

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Population: 131.5 million (67.4 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 85,000

Compulsory recruitment age: no conscription

Voluntary recruitment age: 18

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: signed 8 September 2000

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC, ILO 138, ILO 182, ACRWC

There was no evidence of under-18s being used in the armed forces. There were reports of children being recruited and used by armed groups and armed vigilante groups and involved in intercommunal violence and criminal gangs.

Context

Throughout 2006 and up to the elections in April 2007 politically motivated violence by gangs and militia groups allied to politicians and youth wings of political parties had taken place, and some 300 people were killed.¹ The EU Election Observer Mission found that the elections fell far short of basic international standards,² but in spite of the demand by the opposition for the rejection of the results, the ruling party's candidate, Umaru Yar'Adua, was sworn in as president on 29 May 2007.

The Nigerian government agreed to the extradition of Charles Taylor following intense international pressure. He was wanted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for trial on charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. He was arrested on the border with Cameroon on 29 March 2006 and transferred to the Special Court of Sierra Leone on request by Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. His trial in The Hague was adjourned until January 2008.³

Violence was reported between Christian and Muslim youths, some under 18. In May 2005 Human Rights Watch estimated that approximately 700 Muslims were killed in attacks by Christians on Yelwa, a market town located in the southern part of Plateau state. The number of Christians killed was unknown, one estimate being 70. There were also reports of the abduction of hundreds of women and children during the attacks, most, but not all, of whom were able to return to their families in the following weeks.⁴

In February 2006, 150 people were killed and thousands were displaced due to sectarian violence following protests over the international

publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed.⁵ In September 2006 further violence was reported between Christian and Muslim youths in Dutse, the state capital of Jigawa.⁶

There were continued concerns about the proliferation of small arms, a major destabilizing factor in the country.⁷

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

Although the 1999 constitution allowed for the possibility of conscription, stating that it was the duty of every citizen to "defend Nigeria and render such national service as may be required" (Article 24(b)), no legislation provided for it. There was no conscription.⁸ The 2003 Child Rights Act (Section 34) stated that the minimum age for voluntary recruitment or conscription into the armed forces was 18.⁹

Military training and military schools

There were several military high schools, including the Nigerian Military School, Zaria; the Air Force Military School, Jos; and the Nigerian Navy Secondary-schools in Ojo and Abeokuta.¹⁰ According to the government, the various branches of the military have schools where under-18s are admitted; however, there is no "military activity" beyond parade and disciplinary training.¹¹

Armed groups

Armed groups in the Delta region

Violence in the Niger Delta region between armed groups and the security forces continued, with armed groups' demands ranging from resource-control concessions and amenities and jobs for rural communities, and several oil concessions for faction leaders, to independence.¹² In September 2004 the leader of the armed group Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force threatened to launch an "all-out war" in the region. In September 2005 he was arrested on charges of treason following a failed amnesty deal and was released in June 2007 on health grounds.¹³ New armed groups came to the fore following this declaration, the most prominent of which was the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). MEND claimed responsibility for a number of hostage-takings and violent clashes with security forces from December 2005.¹⁴

Armed groups in the Niger Delta were thought to comprise mainly youths, some of whom were suspected to be under 18. MEND in particular was regarded as a group with a predominantly young membership.¹⁵ In a presentation on children in armed conflict to the UN Security Council in July 2006, a spokesperson for the UN Development Program (UNDP) stressed that UNDP's main

programs in the Niger Delta region aimed at giving youths an alternative to armed violence.¹⁶

Vigilante groups

Illegal armed vigilante groups, in operation in several states, sometimes with the tacit endorsement of state governors, continued to be responsible for unlawful killings. There were reports of under-18s being members of the Bakassi Boys in the east.¹⁷

The Egbesu Boys, in the Niger Delta, allegedly recruited children under 16. The O'odua People's Congress (OPC), of the Yoruba ethnic group, continued to recruit under-18s through its Gani Adams' faction, the Eso group, where the majority of its members were reportedly under 18.¹⁸

Criminal gangs

There was a proliferation in the number of youths (some reportedly under 18) in armed gangs who lived mainly through extortion and robbery, frequently using violence or the threat of violence.¹⁹ The most well-known group was the so-called Area Boys, operating in Lagos. There were clashes between the armed forces and this group in May 2005, and some attempts were being made to rehabilitate the members of these gangs, apparently with little effect.²⁰ Attacks by armed gangs that were part of university student cults also contributed to increased violence.²¹

Developments

In April 2005 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about intercommunal violence and, in particular, the killing of children arising from such conflicts, as well as the "severe physical and psychological trauma" inflicted on children, including child combatants. The Committee was concerned about the vulnerability of refugee children from Chad, Sierra Leone and Liberia, especially girls, to sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, and the problems of drug abuse and economic exploitation were also raised.²² In November 2005 the National Agency for Prohibition and Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters indicated that 15 million Nigerian children were being taken from rural to urban situations for child labour or slavery purposes.²³

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2 European Union Election Observation Mission, Federal Republic of Nigeria, "Elections fail to meet hopes and expectations of the Nigerian people and fall far short of basic international standards", press release, 23 April 2007, <http://eueom-ng.org>.

- 3 Special Court for Sierra Leone, www.sc-sl.org.
- 4 Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Revenge in the name of religion: The cycle of violence in Plateau and Kano States", *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 17, No. 8 (A) (May 2005).
- 5 Christian Allen Purefoy, "Five days of violence by Nigerian Christians and Muslims kill 150", *Independent*, 24 February 2006.
- 6 "Arrests after Nigerian Violence", BBC News, 22 September 2006.
- 7 Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman (eds.), "Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region", Small Arms Survey, April 2005, www.smallarmssurvey.org.
- 8 B. Horeman and M. Stolwijk, *Refusing to Bear Arms: A World Survey of Conscripted and Conscientious Objection to Military Services*, War Resisters International, 1998, www.wri-irg.org.
- 9 Second periodic report of Nigeria to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc. CRC/C/70/Add.24, 17 September 2004.
- 10 Nigerian Military Secondary-schools, <http://members.tripod.com/cdssikeja/links.html>.
- 11 Second periodic report, above note 9.
- 12 ICG, above note 1.
- 13 "Army recaptures Nigerian oil base", BBC News, 21 June 2007.
- 14 Chris McGreal, "Delta Force", *Guardian*, 10 May 2007, www.guardian.co.uk.
- 15 ICG, *Nigeria: Want in the Midst of Plenty*, Africa Report No. 113, 19 July 2006.
- 16 UNDP, Speech by Ad Melkert, UNDP Associate Administrator, on children and armed conflict, to UN Security Council, 24 July 2006.
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- 18 Mohamed Ibrahim, *Empirical Survey of Children and Youth in Organised Armed Violence in Nigeria: Egbesu Boys, OPC and Bakassi Boys as a Case Study*, Children in Organised and Armed Violence, 7 May 2005, www.coav.org.br.
- 19 HRW, *Rivers and Blood: Guns, Power and Oil in Nigeria's Rivers States*, briefing paper, February 2005.
- 20 "Nigeria: Area Boys – a growing menace on the streets of Lagos", IRIN, 15 July 2005.
- 21 "Nigeria: Gangs sowing terror on campus", IRIN, 22 February 2007.
- 22 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of report submitted by Nigeria, Concluding observations, UN Doc. CRC/C/15/Add.257, 13 April 2005.
- 23 CRIN, "Nigeria: 15 Million Children Toil in Slavery", 22 November 2005, www.crin.org.