

Hi again! Thanks for joining us on As It Is. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

Violence continues in northeastern Nigeria, although the military is trying to stop the Islamic group called Boko Haram. What is worse, some people say the violence is spreading.

Steve Ember has a report from the Nigerian state of Bauchi.

Those are Islamic school children studying the Arabic alphabet. Their teacher says people in the area are increasingly afraid of Boko Haram militants.

He says that Boko Haram claims to be fighting for its version of Islamic law. But, he says he does not understand why the group is increasingly attacking Muslim communities.

"What is the actual target? Who are hiding behind this umbrella? Actually this is what we have noticed with regards to these actions of Boko Haram."

The teacher says it is hard to say what the group really wants. He did not give his name because he was afraid the militants would attack him.

Boko Haram militants have attacked a number of local leaders in the last four years. The group is also blamed for thousands of deaths in attacks on schools, churches, mosques, security forces, bridges, roads, and government buildings.

The government has tried to fight back by declaring a state of emergency and creating security areas, especially in city neighborhoods.

But in recent weeks, there have been attacks outside the security areas, including country villages. In Bauchi, police say gun attacks killed four officers Thursday night.

Thomas Hansen is an Africa expert at the security company Control Risks. He says the militants are trying to prevent villagers from supporting the government's security efforts.

But at least one expert says the government is its own worst enemy. John Campbell is a former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria.

“The government’s heavy-handed brutal approach, if anything, tends to drive public support to Boko Haram. Absolutely counter-productive.”

Mr. Campbell says the government should arrest Boko Haram suspects instead of shooting them or detaining them in inhumane conditions.

He also says the government should provide more help to the people of northern Nigeria. For example, he says the government should deal with the poverty in the area, improve education, and offer medical services.

But back in Bauchi, a university professor is not as hopeful about ending the conflict. The teacher, who did not want to give his name, says Boko Haram’s religious beliefs are too strong.

“The government resorted to using force, and force cannot kill spirit. That is their objective so the war, it is an endless war. Only God will take care of that one.”

Earlier this week, Nigerian lawmakers approved extending the state of emergency in three states.

I’m Steve Ember.

And we have more troubling news about violence in Africa. Some officials are warning that the Central African Republic, also called CAR, is attracting terrorist groups. A top United Nations official says those groups may include Boko Haram.

Experts say CAR is the kind of environment that militant groups are seeking. It is a large country with a small population. It is rich in diamonds, gold and ivory. And, it has a weak government and little rule of law.

The country's recent history helps explain some of the problems. Michel Djotodia seized power about eight months ago. He got Muslim rebels, including paid fighters from Chad and Sudan, to help him become president. The rebels also included a group that calls itself "Seleka," or alliance.

Experts say there were only a few thousand Seleka forces at the beginning. Now, some experts say there are as many as 25,000 Seleka forces. The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that number includes about 3,500 children.

Officials say the Seleka forces steal, rape, and kill people without being punished.

Edmond Mulet is the assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping operations at the United Nations. He says the weak government in CAR is similar to the one in Mali in 2012. In Mali, Islamic groups linked to al-Qaida took power.

Mr. Mulet says he thinks the first militants to arrive in CAR may be the Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram.

“I don't think about al-Shabab, but certainly Boko Haram we have some indications that there is some kind of a presence here, yes.”

Yet some wonder if talking about Boko Haram in CAR is just a way to get more foreign money and soldiers.

General Babacar Gaye does not support the claim. He heads the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR. General Gaye says terrorist groups are only one problem. The country's biggest threat, he says, are the huge humanitarian, security, and human rights problems. Those issues have forced thousands from their homes. A third of the population is in need.

“For the time being, we don't need to have the presence of any terrorist groups to be mobilized and to be concerned by the situation. I can assure you that the people on the ground, their suffering is worth mobilizing the international community on stabilizing this country, alleviating the suffering. We don't need to have Boko Haram to mobilize people.”

The United Nations has warned that the “seeds of genocide” are being planted in CAR. But few people are watching the country closely. As a result, it will be hard to know when, or if, terrorist groups completely take power, and widespread violence begins.

And that’s As It Is. I’m Kelly Jean Kelly. Hannah McNeish and Heather Murdock provided additional reporting.

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