In Nigeria, escalating religious conflict impacts Adventist Church

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Adding to the turmoil, the country's government recently eliminated energy subsidies, doubling the price of gasoline and inciting nationwide strikes and demonstrations. News reports indicate that Nigerians are living in fear of continuing unrest.

Meanwhile, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie called on religious leaders in her country to speak out against the violence, the Guardian reported last week.

"Christian leaders must continue to preach peace and togetherness so that Christians do not retaliate," Adichie told the Guardian. "Muslim leaders must strongly and repeatedly condemn the violence against Christians and make it clear that Boko Haram does not represent Nigerian Islam," she said.

The Adventist Church in the country has devoted recent days to fasting and prayer for the ongoing situation. Church administration in the country is encouraging membership to work in small groups and avoid large public religious gatherings. Open air evangelism efforts have been put on hold due to a curfew and the fragile security situation, church officials said.

According to a report by Northeast Nigeria Conference President Bindas Stephen Haruna, the Adventist Church there has not suffered property damage or loss of life. However, some individual members have had their property looted or burned.

"The situation in Northern Nigeria shows how a lack of religious freedom can affect the life of churches, and why we must promote and strongly defend this essential freedom before it is too late," said John Graz, director for the Adventist world church's Public Affairs and Religious Liberty.

Church attendance in northeast Nigeria has dropped drastically, leading to church closures in some regions where most members are traveling business people who have returned to their homes. In other churches, pastors have left their congregations for fear of being killed.

The situation has produced a wave of small group evangelism, church leaders said. As Nigerian Adventists funnel their efforts to spread the Adventist hope on a smaller scale, church officials in the country are soliciting the prayers and support of the world church family.