



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Nigeria

Nigeria – NGA36075 – Ilaje – Ijaw – Yoruba – Muslims – Gbaramatu – MEND – Port Harcourt riots – Christian businessmen – Abuja – Human sacrifices

02 February 2010

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### **1. Is Ilaje an ethnic group? If so, do Ilaje people belong to the Yoruba tribe/ethnicity?**

Group identity in Nigeria, like elsewhere in Africa, is extremely complex, with national identity, religion, ethno-linguistic group, tribe and clan allegiances all competing as sources. Dr Aderemi Suleiman Ajala from the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) wrote in a 2009 paper that the name ‘Yoruba’ is a collective name for a group of over two dozen related dialects, including Ilaje. Dr Ajala argues that a pan-Yoruba identity is real; however, it is historically recent and “[u]p to the present day the people still retain these ethnonyms as their different local identities, despite the creation of a pan-ethnic Yoruba identity that seems to bind them together as a political unit.”<sup>1</sup>

A region to the east of Lagos, in southwest Nigeria, is deemed by the Ilaje as their homeland, although reports and events suggest that the Arogbo-Ijaws have a competing claim to the same region. The Ilaje Association of America locates the Ilaje homeland as follows: “Ilajeland is bounded by the Ijebus to the West, the Ikale to the North, the Itsekiri to the East. The Apoi and Arogbo Ijaw to the North East, while the Atlantic Ocean formed the southern boundary.” The Association also states that the Ilaje are subdivided into “four geo-political entities namely Ugbo, Mahin, Etikan and Aheri.”<sup>2</sup>

### **2. Is the Ilaje Yoruba ethnicity distinct from the Ijaw ethnic group? What are the main ethnic groups that live in the village of Oporoza, Gbaramatu Kingdom, Delta State? Do Yorubas also live there?**

The Ijaw are not a member of the Yoruba ethno-linguistic group that includes the Ilaje. Minorities at Risk describes the Ijaw as distinct ethnic group.<sup>3</sup> An elaborate historiography of the Ijaw goes to great lengths to explain that the Ilaje sought refuge among the Ijaw in Ondo state and therefore the Ijaw presence in Nigeria predates that of the Ilaje. The same historiography claims that the Ijaw are not only the autochthonous people of the Niger Delta, but in fact of the entire country.<sup>4</sup> Despite the political nature of such a version of history, it is useful in so far as it highlights the clear perception of ethnic difference between the Ijaw and the Ilaje.

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<sup>1</sup> Ajala, A.S. 2009, *Yoruba Nationalism: Culture, Politics and Violence in South-western Nigeria (1900-2009)*, University of Mainz, p.8 – Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> ‘Our History: Spotlight On Ilaje Land’ 2007, Ilaje Association of America website <http://ilajeusa.com/History.htm> – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 2

<sup>3</sup> Minorities at Risk 2003, *Assessment for Ijaw in Nigeria*, 31 December

<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=47506> – Accessed 6 January 2009 – Attachment 3

<sup>4</sup> Eferusoa, J.E.B et al (undated), ‘Press Release By Ijaws Of Egbema Clan: Rejoinder’, United Ijaw website <http://www.unitedijaw.com/egbemaclan.htm> – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 4

The ethnic divide between the Ijaw and the Ilaje erupted into violence in the late nineteen nineties; in 1998 and 1999 violent clashes broke out in Ondo state between the Ilaje and the Arogbo-Ijaws, leaving hundreds dead. Karl Maier, writing in 1999 for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, states that “[t]he rivalry first erupted on 19 September 1998 when hundreds of people were killed and thousands made homeless during a series of battles. Both sides claim to be the true owners of the area. At the end of July 1999, the Ilajes reportedly launched a series of raids against the Ijaws to re-capture villages held by the Ijaws since last year’s troubles. Ilaje spokespersons claimed to have recaptured 51 out of the 68 villages and towns they had lost previously to the Ijaws.”<sup>5</sup> A news report in *IRIN* in 1999 stated that the cause of the fighting was due to the ownership of “disputed land thought to be rich in oil and located near the Atlantic coast.”<sup>6</sup> In Nigeria, having official status as the autochthonous ethnic group of a region entitles the group to an exclusive share of oil/gas revenue, thus explaining the competing elaborate histories each ethnic group has constructed to argue their case for indigenous status. Since the deadly events of 1998 and 1999 there have been no reports of similar Ilaje-Ijaw clashes in Ondo state or elsewhere.

The small Gbaramatu kingdom has a population of approximately twenty thousand according to Amnesty International.<sup>7</sup> No demographic statistics have been located for the kingdom, although one source describes Gbaramatu as a ‘homogenous Ijaw ward’ and an oil-rich Ijaw community.<sup>8</sup> No sources located refer to a resident Ilaje minority in the kingdom. The nearby city of Warri does have a significant population of Itsekiri, described by the Minorities at Risk Project as a sub-group of the Yoruba.<sup>9</sup>

The Ijaw, Urhobo and the Itsekiri all claim to be the “true indigenes” of both Warri and the region. As stated above, indigenous status bestows both political and economic benefits on an ethnic group. According to the Minorities at Risk, “[o]nly the Itsekiri have been successful in asserting their claim to be the true indigenes of Warri. All three of Warri’s Local Government Areas are run by predominantly Itsekiri administrations and Warri’s representative in the federal National Assembly is also an Itsekiri, a fact that the town’s Urhobo and Ijaw residents believe has resulted in the economic and political marginalization of their communities.”<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Do Ijaw Muslims exist?

A number of sources refer to the Ijaw as predominantly Christian, with a small minority classified as animists (approximately five percent).<sup>11</sup> Ijaw converts to Islam do exist, the most famous being the former leader of the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Mujahid Dokubo-Asari. Asari, originally named Dokubo Melford Goodhead, converted to

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<sup>5</sup> Maier, K. 1999, *Nigeria: A Second Chance?*, September, p.12 – Attachment 5

<sup>6</sup> ‘Nigeria: Panel seeks end to ethnic Ijaw, Ilaje clashes’ 1999, University Of Pennsylvania, source: *IRIN*, 5 August <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Newsletters/irinw722.html> – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 6

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International 2009, ‘Nigeria: Hundreds feared dead and thousands trapped in Niger Delta fighting’, AI UK website, 22 May [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=18217](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18217) – Accessed 5 January 2010 – Attachment 7

<sup>8</sup> Leton, M. 2006, *Oil And The Urban Question: Fuelling Violence and Politics in Warri*, University of California Berkeley, pp12-13 <http://geography.berkeley.edu/ProjectsResources/ND%20Website/NigerDelta/WP/8-Leton.pdf> – Accessed 2 February 2010 – Attachment 8

<sup>9</sup> Minorities at Risk 2004, Chronology for Ijaw in Nigeria, – Attachment 9

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch 2006, *They Do Not Own This Place: Government Discrimination Against non-Indigenes in Nigeria*, April, p.61 – Attachment 10

<sup>11</sup> Minorities at Risk 2003, *Assessment for Ijaw in Nigeria*, 31 December <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=47506> – Accessed 6 January 2009 – Attachment 3

Islam in the 1990s. Asari stated in 2005 that Muslims comprise less than one percent of the total Ijaw population.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Do Muslim militant groups exist fighting for the Niger Delta cause? Do any of the militant/militia groups in the Niger Delta include Muslims members?**

No reference has been located to militant Islamic groups in the Delta. As noted in the response to question 3, the former leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, is a Muslim convert; however, as a leader of a Delta militia, Asari appears to be an aberration. Writing in the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor* in 2005, Stephen Schwartz stated that "Asari has not tried to integrate Islam into the Niger Delta struggle." Asari himself has stated that "[t]here's no room for implementation of Sharia in the Niger Delta because among the Ijaws, the Muslims are less than one percent and they do not have political control of the Ijaw people...As far as this land is concerned, Ijaw is not by rule Islamic...the issue of Sharia does not arise in Ijaw land."<sup>13</sup>

#### **5. Are there any reports of Muslims belonging to MEND?**

An April 2009 research response by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada states that "[a] majority of MEND members are reported to be from the Ijaw ethnic group". However, quoting a Jamestown Foundation report, it also states that MEND "draws members from communities across the Niger Delta, differs from other cults and ethnic militias 'placing its struggle in a social rather than ethnic context'." The IRB also cites Kingsley Kuku, who they described as "a prominent Ijaw politician" who has "corroborated the presence of Itsekiri and Urhoho members, while adding that he believed that youths from the Isoko ethnic group were also members... Kuku also stated that "even Yoruba youths" are affiliated with MEND."<sup>14</sup> Given such diversity, it is likely that membership also represents the full spectrum of religions in Nigeria.

As previously stated in *RRT Country Advice NGA35982*, MEND is not a single organisation, but rather an umbrella group of likeminded militias, lacking a central command.<sup>15</sup> Stephanie Hanson, writing for the Council on Foreign Relations in 2007 states that the true number and makeup of MEND members is not precisely known; "[e]stimates of its size range from the low hundreds to the low thousands" and "[t]he leadership of MEND is similarly unclear." Given such circumstance, there is no reliable data on MEND demography.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Schwartz, S. 2005, 'Islamic Extremism on the Rise in Nigeria', *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 3, Issue 20, Jamestown Foundation, 21 October [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=593](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=593) – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 11

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz, S. 2005, 'Islamic Extremism on the Rise in Nigeria', *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 3, Issue 20, Jamestown Foundation, 21 October [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=593](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=593) – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 11

<sup>14</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2009, *NGA103175.E – Nigeria: Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); whether it forcibly recruits its members and, if so, how; whether members are only from the Ijaw ethnic group (2006-May 2009)*, 16 June <http://www2.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=452413> – Accessed 1 December 2009 – Attachment 12

<sup>15</sup> RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice NGA35982*, 12 January – Attachment 13

<sup>16</sup> Hanson, S. 2007, 'MEND: The Niger Delta's Umbrella Militant Group', Council on Foreign Relations, 22 March <http://www.cfr.org/publication/12920/> – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 14

**6. Is Sharia law in place in Abuja? Are there any reports of Christians being discriminated against in terms of access to housing (or for any other reason) in Abuja?**

Sharia law is practiced in 12 of Nigeria's 36 states according to the United States Department of State.<sup>17</sup> No sources state that Sharia has been imposed in the capital territory of Abuja.

A number of sources describe housing in Abuja as the most expensive in Nigeria; however, no reports suggest that Christians experience discrimination gaining access to housing, employment or any other services in the capital. Rather, sources indicate that the poor and middle classes across the religious spectrum have difficulty finding affordable housing in Abuja. A 2007 *BBC News* article suggests that the availability and cost of housing in Abuja has become worse since large numbers of unauthorised dwellings and suburbs that didn't adhere to the original city planned have been levelled under the orders of "high-profile minister Nasir el-Rufai". Mr el-Rufai is quoted in the article as having once said that Abuja is "not a city for the poor". The article also quotes a public servant, Dayyabu Haruna, as stating that "Abuja is such an expensive city that a person without a job cannot last here...I work in a government office in the city. But my salary is not enough to pay for the expensive houses in the city."<sup>18</sup> A 2006 article in *The New York Times* similarly claims that since Nasir el-Rufai became minister in charge of Abuja in 2003, the destruction of whole neighbourhoods has made accommodation for the city's vast numbers of poor and middle classes unaffordable.<sup>19</sup>

According to the US Department of State, between 2003 and 2008 the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) illegally demolished both homes and businesses; "[t]he FCDA maintained the public position that the homes and offices did not comply with the master plan for the city. According to the Swiss-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, authorities demolished more than 800,000 homes in the Abuja area since 2003."<sup>20</sup>

No references have been found to any forms of discrimination suffered by Christians in Abuja.

**7. Are there any reports of Muslim/Christian riots that took place near Port Harcourt in late 2008/early 2009?**

Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state, has a recent history of violence; however, no sources refer to riots or clashes between Muslims and Christians in the city in late 2008/early 2009. A *Reuters* article examining violence in the Delta and published in February 2009 states that "[m]ore recently, the violence has centred around Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state to the east, although much of the unrest has been criminal rather than political in nature, including frequent kidnappings for ransom and piracy."<sup>21</sup> The article does not mention sectarian violence in 2008 or 2009.

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<sup>17</sup> US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Nigeria*, 25 February, Section C – Attachment 15

<sup>18</sup> Murray, S. 2007, 'Life of poverty in Abuja's wealth', *BBC News*, 13 February

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6355269.stm> – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 16

<sup>19</sup> Polgreen, L. 2006, 'In a Dream City, a Nightmare for the Common Man', *The New York Times*, 13 December <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/13/world/africa/13abuja.html?pagewanted=1&ei=5090&en=9b1bb2ecd684791c&ex=1323666000&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss> – Accessed 28 January 2010 – Attachment 17

<sup>20</sup> US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Nigeria*, 25 February, Section F – Attachment 15

<sup>21</sup> 'Nigerian militants attack Shell gas plant in Delta' 2009, *Reuters*, 7 February

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L7214715.htm> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 18

The most significant violence in Port Harcourt in recent years appears to have taken place in August 2007 between criminal gangs and Nigeria's Joint Task Force (JTF). Amnesty International's assessment in 2008 is similar to the *Reuters* assessment, suggesting that the violence in Port Harcourt is criminal in nature. Amnesty International's 2008 annual report on Nigeria states that "[i]n August, rival gangs clashed in the streets of Port Harcourt, killing at least 30 people and injuring many more, including bystanders. More died when the Joint Military Taskforce (JTF) intervened using helicopters and machine-guns – at least 32 gang members, members of the security forces and bystanders were killed... The violence continued and intensified towards the end of the year."<sup>22</sup>

**8. Are there any reports of Yorubas facing significant discrimination in Nigeria on account of their ethnicity alone?**

The Yoruba, together with the Hausa/Fulani, are among the most politically and economically powerful ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria. A 2006 assessment by Minorities at Risk states that "[t]he Yoruba do not face any ecological or demographic constraints; nor do they face significant levels of cultural, political or economic discrimination. In the 1999 democratic elections, a Yoruba was elected president. As a result, many of the restrictions they had faced earlier were removed." Violence between Yoruba and other ethnic groups is common, especially with the Hausa/Fulani, as is intercommunal violence.<sup>23</sup> As stated in the response to question 2, the Itsekiri (a Yoruba sub-group) are recognised by the state as the indigenous people of Warri, the capital of Delta state, and therefore dominate the institutions of power in Warri and the region.<sup>24</sup>

**9. Are there any reports of Christian businessmen being discriminated against and/or specifically targeted for harm in Nigeria?**

No references have been located that indicate that Christian businessmen are either discriminated against or are at particular risk of harm. Christians constitute over forty percent of Nigeria's population and form the vast majority in the south. Muslim Hausa-Fulani have historically dominated post-independence Nigerian politics according to John Campbell for the Council on Foreign Relations; however, Campbell also argues that in democratic Nigeria, both northern Muslims and southern have their own powerful political and economic elites. These elites, writes Campbell, rotate power in Abuja rather than attempt to monopolise it.<sup>25</sup> The most recent US Department of State report on religious freedom in Nigeria does not make any reference to discrimination of Christian businessmen.<sup>26</sup>

**10. Are there any reports of Yorubas, or outsiders in general, being vulnerable to traditional harmful practices such as human sacrifice?**

Ritual killings and the use of human body parts by cults are not uncommon in Nigeria; however, no sources argue that Yorubas or any other ethnic group are particularly vulnerable to such practices. A 2005 article by Leo Igwe, cited by the UK Home Office in 2008, states

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<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International 2008, *Amnesty International Annual Report Nigeria*, 28 May – Attachment 19

<sup>23</sup> Minorities at Risk 2006, 'Assessment for Yoruba in Nigeria', 31 December

<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=47505> – Accessed 29 January – Attachment 20

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch 2006, *They Do Not Own This Place: Government Discrimination Against non-Indigenes in Nigeria*, April, p.61 – Attachment 10

<sup>25</sup> Campbell, J. 2009, 'Nigeria's Leadership Vacuum', Council on Foreign Relations, 30 December [http://www.cfr.org/publication/21085/nigerias\\_leadership\\_vacuum.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21085/nigerias_leadership_vacuum.html) – Accessed 1 February 2010 – Attachment 21

<sup>26</sup> US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Nigeria*, 26 October – Attachment 22

that “ritual killing is a common practice in Nigeria. Every year, hundreds of Nigerians lose their lives to ritual murders, also known as head-hunters.” According to Igwe, body parts are used by “witchdoctors, juju priests and traditional medicine men” for “sacrifices or for the preparation of assorted magical portions [sic].”<sup>27</sup> Leo Igwe is the head of Centre for Inquiry in Nigeria and a member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union and is widely cited as a campaigner against superstition and cult practices in Nigeria.

A 1999 response by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) reports that an unnamed professor at the Africana Studies and Research Centre at Cornell University told the IRB “that ritual murders are very common in southern Nigeria, but less so in northern Nigeria.” The professor is said to have employed the word “rampant” to describe the harvesting of people for body parts to be used in rituals.<sup>28</sup>

Police have conducted raids on shrines where sacrifices have taken place and made a number of arrests. One infamous raid was conducted on Okija shrine by police in 2004. According to International Humanist and Ethical Union police discovered “headless bodies, skulls and other remains of dead humans.”<sup>29</sup> A June 2009 RRT Research Response refers to other police operations, particularly in the state of Enugu.<sup>30</sup>

A 2008 article in the Nigerian online magazine *The News*, cites a number of examples of recent ritual killings. Many of the cases suggest that children are the most common victims of such killings; however, the article also states that “[i]nvestigations revealed that the killers strike mainly at bush paths, markets, lonely environments, hotels and brothels, popular bus stopovers or terminals, and hot spots across the country. People are advised not to travel long distances alone but in company of others. They should also desist from using short-cuts or pathways at odd hours.”<sup>31</sup>

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Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

### United Nations (UN)

UN Refugee Agency – Refworld <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd>

### Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>

International Crisis Group [www.icg.org](http://www.icg.org)

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<sup>27</sup> UK Home Office 2008, *Country of Origin Information Report: Nigeria*, 5 December, section 19.05-19.10 – Attachment 23

<sup>28</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, NGA34530.E – *Nigeria: Succession practices for the “Eze” (king) within the Amakor-Nanka community in Anambra State, including whether it is hereditary to the eldest son; rituals performed in the succession ceremonies and whether they could be considered unacceptable for a Christian to perform; consequences to an individual for refusing to accept succession and state protection available*, 12 June – Attachment 24

<sup>29</sup> International Humanist and Ethical Union 2009, ‘The gospel of distrust: the ritual killing of human beings in Nigeria’, IHEU website, 19 July – <http://www.iheu.org/node/3151> – Accessed 7 October 2009 – Attachment 25

<sup>30</sup> RRT Research and Information 2009, *Research Response NGA34955*, 2 June – Attachment 26

<sup>31</sup> Adegbamigbe, A. 2008, ‘Terror Of Rutual Killers (sic)’, *The News*, 31 March <http://thenewsng.com/cover-story/terror-of-rutual-killers/2008/03> – Accessed 1 February 2010 – Attachment 27

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