



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

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# Country Advice

## Nigeria

### Nigeria – NGA38012 – Tensions between Ebijakara and Ebom communities in Cross River State – Status of Christian/Muslim tensions

27 January 2011

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#### 1. What information, if any, is there about the Ebijakara ethnic group?

Sources confirm that Ebijakara is a village in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State, but no information was found to indicate that the people of that village constitute a separate Ebijakara ethnic group. Nor was any information found to state the ethnicity of the people of Ebijakara village, however, most broadly, sources indicate that in the south-eastern states, including Cross River State, the Ibo ethnic group is predominant.<sup>1</sup>

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “[t]he population of Cross River State consists largely of the Efik and Ekoi peoples”.<sup>2</sup> The Official Website of the Cross River State makes no reference to ethnic groups, but advises that the major languages within the state are Efik, Ejagham, Bekwarra and English.<sup>3</sup> The OnlineNigeria website similarly refers to Efik, Ejagham and Bekwarra as the three principal languages in Cross River State, and additionally comments that these represent the state’s three major ethnic groups. With specific reference to Abi Local Government Area, within which Ebijakara is located, OnlineNigeria advises that the Bahumono ethnic group forms part of the Ekois group.<sup>4</sup>

A Wikipedia<sup>5</sup> article on Abi Local Government Area (Abi LGA) states that the Bahumono is one of the largest tribes within the area and includes seven villages, one of which is Ebom.<sup>6</sup> A 2001 article on works within Abi LGA refers to “the Bahumono community” in the sense of it constituting a geographical area.<sup>7</sup> The Joshua Project website refers to the “Kohumono,

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<sup>1</sup> See for example US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Nigeria*, Section I – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Cross River’ 2011, *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/144175/Cross-River> – Accessed 25 January 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>3</sup> ‘About Cross River State’ (undated), Official Website of the Cross River State

[http://www.crossriverstate.gov.ng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=721&Itemid=97](http://www.crossriverstate.gov.ng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=721&Itemid=97) – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 3.

<sup>4</sup> ‘People, Population and Settlement’ (undated), OnlineNigeria website

<http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/crossriveradv.asp?blurb=226> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 4.

<sup>5</sup> NOTE: Wikipedia is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is compiled collaboratively by volunteers. Wikipedia articles can be useful introductory reading for a new topic, and the list of references in Wikipedia articles can provide useful leads to reliable sources. Many Wikipedia articles can be reliable, especially in regards to non-controversial historical or factual matters, and Wikipedia uses preventative measures against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy. However, the collaborative nature of Wikipedia makes it vulnerable to contributors with overt or covert agendas, and Wikipedia articles are thus prone to unacknowledged bias.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Abi, Nigeria’ (undated), Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abi,\\_Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abi,_Nigeria) – Accessed 25 January 2011 – Attachment 5.

<sup>7</sup> Basse, O. 2001, ‘Group Accuses Council Boss of Corruption’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *This Day*, 29 October <http://allafrica.com/stories/200110290158.html> – Accessed 25 January 2011 – Attachment 6.

Bahumono” peoples, whose language has 45,000 speakers and who are classified as being of part of a “people cluster” known as Benue.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps significantly, here, this differentiates them from the Igbo people who are classified as a separate “people cluster”.<sup>9</sup>

The Wikipedia article notes that there are linguistic differences among the Bahumono people, but that they are “all historically known to have migrated from a place within the hills”.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the people of Ebijakara are referred to as “Ebijakara indigenes” in a number of sources<sup>11</sup>. In Nigeria, there is a legal distinction between “indigenes”, whose ethnic group is considered native to a location, and “settlers”, whose ethnic roots are in another part of the country, and it is reported that “[i]n nearly all states, rivalries between ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers’ led to societal discrimination against minority groups”.<sup>12</sup>

The above information, considered cumulatively, suggests that the people of Ebijakara may be indigenes of the Igbo ethnic group, while neighbouring communities such as Ebom may be settlers of the Bahumono ethnic group and Benue cluster.

## **2. What is the history and current status of tensions between Ebijakara and Ebom communities in Cross River State, Nigeria?**

Tensions between Ebijakara and Ebom were reported in a media article dated 26 January 2006 which noted that the Governor of Cross River State had “set up a judicial commission of inquiry into hostilities between Ebom and Ebijakara communities in Abi Local Government Area of the state, with a mission to investigate the remote and immediate causes of the crisis” which he said had claimed several lives. It was reported that the Governor “blamed traditional rulers, village heads and council chairmen for the incessant communal crisis in their domain”.<sup>13</sup> That “another land tussle claimed several lives and property at Ebijakara Community in Abi Local Government Area that was attacked by the neighbouring Ebom village” was also mentioned in an article in the *Daily Sun* in March 2006.<sup>14</sup>

In September 2008, the *Daily Champion* published a record of an interview with the Chairman of the Abi Local Government Area, covering a range of issues including the still unresolved conflict between the people of Ebijakara and Ebom. On this subject, the Chairman is reported to have said:

Apart from inaugurating the Boundary Disputes and Conflict Resolution Committee and holding monthly security meetings with Heads of Security Agencies in Abi LGA, we have

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<sup>8</sup> ‘People-in-Country Profile – Kohumono, Bahumono of Nigeria’ (undated), Joshua Project website <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?rog3=NI&peo3=12743> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>9</sup> ‘People-in-Country Profile – Igbo, Ibo of Nigeria’ (undated), Joshua Project website <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?rog3=NI&peo3=12189> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 8.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Abi, Nigeria’ (undated), Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abi,\\_Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abi,_Nigeria) – Accessed 25 January 2011 – Attachment 5.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Johnson, K. 2010, ‘ICC considers petition on sack of Cross River community’, *The Nation*, 15 December <http://thenationonlineng.net/web3/news/21709.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 9.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2010 Report on International Religious Freedom – Nigeria*, Section II – Attachment 1.

<sup>13</sup> Uneze, A. 2006, ‘Communal Clashes: Duke Summons Monarchs, LG Bosses’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *This Day*, 27 January <http://allafrica.com/stories/200601270212.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 10.

<sup>14</sup> Nzama, B. 2006, ‘Man slashes brother’s throat’, *Daily Sun*, 2 March <http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/crimewatch/2006/mar/02/crimewatch-02-03-2006-003.htm> – Accessed 25 January 2011 – Attachment 11.

been talking to Ebom/Ebijakara, Usumutong/ Ijom Abayong. It is expected that by next week we are going to arrange another meeting of Youths. We want to come up with a report to his Excellency. This is the situation on ground concerning Ebom/Ebijakara people. On how to resettle Ebom/Ebijakara people for now in terms of general state of security in Abi LGA we are very okay because all decisions were collectively reached.<sup>15</sup>

No further reporting on the matter was located before an article in *This Day* in October 2010 reported that the people of Ebijakara community had taken action to sue the Federal and the Cross River State Governments “for alleged gross violation of their rights after their homeland was violently sacked in January 2006”:

In the affidavit filed in support of their case, the Ebijakara community alleged that the refusal or failure and or neglect of the various tiers of governments such as the Federal Government, Cross River State and Abi Local Government Area Council since January, 2006 to clear the militia forces from Ebom community which had occupied their ancestral homelands and dispersed the Ebijakara community to various neighbouring towns such as Ikom, Ugep, Usumutong and Calabar amounts to an abdication of the duty and responsibility foisted by these governments by international law to provide security for the Ebijakara people to enjoy their inalienable rights to freedom of liberty, association and family life.

...

They are also seeking “An Order directing the 1<sup>st</sup> - 5th Respondents to use its apparatuses and instruments of the State to clear or remove or evict from Ebijakara Territory or Community the armed militia which the Ebom Community deployed to occupy Ebijakara Territory since the 15th January, 2006, to prevent the people of Ebijakara to return to their ancestral homeland”.<sup>16</sup>

Indicating that tensions between the Ebijakara and Ebom communities have existed since at least 1964, the article further reported that:

the Claimants alleged that the Ebom Community had always harboured the plan to attack and sack the Ebijakara community and covet their ancestral lands despite the Judgment of the Supreme Court of Nigeria delivered in 1964, which declared that the present Ebom Town is part of the territorial lands belonging to the Ebijakara, which the Ebom people have refused to obey.<sup>17</sup>

The Ebijakara community’s legal action was also reported in *The Guardian*.<sup>18</sup>

In November 2010, an article in *This Day* reported that the displaced people of Ebijakara community had petitioned the International Criminal Court of Justice (ICCJ) “over the failure of the Federal Government of Nigeria to address their grievances”:

The Community said they were “forcefully expelled or displaced from their ancestral homeland in Ebijakara, Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State of Nigeria by a

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<sup>15</sup> Moses, T. 2008, ‘Major Challenges in Local Govt Administration – Local Govt Boss’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Daily Champion*, 23 September <http://allafrica.com/stories/200809230339.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 12.

<sup>16</sup> Chinwo, E. 2010, ‘Displaced Community Sues FG, State, Others for N10 Billion’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *This Day*, 18 October <http://allafrica.com/stories/201010190220.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 13.

<sup>17</sup> Chinwo, E. 2010, ‘Displaced Community Sues FG, State, Others for N10 Billion’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *This Day*, 18 October <http://allafrica.com/stories/201010190220.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 13.

<sup>18</sup> Akpan, A. 2010, ‘Displaced council residents sue govt, seek N10b damages’, *The Guardian*, 20 October <http://odili.net/news/source/2010/oct/20/9.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 14.

Militia Force recruited, funded and sponsored by indigenes of Ebom Community particularly those mentioned below and are now living in Refugees Camps in Calabar; Usumutong - Ediba; Ugep; and other neighbouring communities since January, 2006”.

The petitioners are accusing fifty-one people either from Ebom or in collaboration with the Ebom people of financing, acquiring arms and recruitment of those who attacked and sacked the Ebijakara community, leaving in its trail lost human lives and property valued at billions of naira.

The Community said they were a thriving and prosperous Community before they were “invaded and sacked by an armed militia organised, instigated, prompted, sponsored, financed and carried out” by Ebom Community on the 15th January, 2006, with the tacit co-operation and support of a contingent of Police Mobile Force of the Nigeria Police Force deployed to maintain Law, Order and Peace in the Ebom and Ebijakara Communities and elements of the Government of Cross River State and Abi Local Government Area.<sup>19</sup>

On 22 November 2010, *The Nation* similarly reported that the Ebijakara community had taken their case to the ICCJ. In response to that report, three readers posted comments on *The Nation*'s website, each indicating that the attack on Ebijakara had been preceded by an attack on Ebom by persons from the Ebijakara community. A comment posted on 23 November stated that “what happened between Ebom and Ebijakara stems from hatred between both communities for over 100 years” and that the events of January 2006 had started on 11 January, when “Ebijakara attacked Ebom and burnt down over 250 houses in 3 days, killing over 35 people in one day”. A second writer stated that his uncle, a Chief, Elder and President of the Customary Court, had been murdered by Ebijakara people on 11 January. In a lengthy and detailed comment, including reference to specific sections of a government White Paper Report on the conflict, a third writer similarly claimed that “the truth is that it was Ebijakara who commenced a native war on the 11th of January 2006”. That writer stated, in part, that:

Ebijakara unleashed a grand design to annihilate, and wipe out Ebom... Over 195 Ebom houses were burnt down by Ebijakara on the 11th – 14th of January 2006 translating to 48 houses per day... at the time of the attack by Ebijakara on the 11th of January 2006, most of the population left behind in the village of Ebom were the Elderly, retired persons, and Children, so Ebijakara attacked, killed, maimed, looted, burnt and destroyed Ebom property unabated or unchallenged and that explains why over 220 houses were destroyed in such a short time.

... Also testifying before the commission was Honourable Eko Atu, the then indefatigable Chairman of Abi Local Government Area... [who] testified that he was at Ebom and Ebijakara that morning of the 11th of January 2006 and that Ebijakara invaded Ebom on that 11th day of January 2006 when Ebom people had left their houses and had gone to farm. He said he saw one Moses Ike Iko (also known as Oranike), whom he knew very well through his political dealings with our communities, threatening to kill him, if he did not leave the vicinity of mayhem, and that he saw when he and other Ebijakara men were burning and looting Ebom houses.<sup>20</sup>

The writer of that comment also stated that the White Paper Report had noted that the Commission had “sighted a shrine belonging to Ebijakara Community... which suggested that ritual killings had been going on at Ebijakara, prior to the hostilities”. The writer also referred

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<sup>19</sup> Chinwo, E. 2010, ‘Genocide – Community Petitions ICCJ’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *This Day*, 21 November <http://allafrica.com/stories/201011220968.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 15.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, K. 2010, ‘Community takes case to ICJ’, *The Nation*, 22 November <http://thenationonline.net/web3/news/19571.html> – Accessed 20 January 2011 – Attachment 16.

to a killing related to the “ritualistic Pedigree of Ebijakara” in September 2005, and to an attack by Ebijakara on Ebom in December 2005.<sup>21</sup>

On 15 December 2010, *The Nation* reported that the ICCJ “has said it will investigate the allegations of genocide against Ebom community in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State by the people of Ebijakara”.<sup>22</sup>

The Official Website of the Cross River State currently refers to a White Paper on a communal clash between two other groups that is about to be printed and publicly released, however no reference was found to the White Paper on the Ebijakara/Ebom conflict.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. Is there any record of violent clashes between these communities in January 2006 (where purportedly 200 people died)?**

The information from the Nigerian news media provided in response to the previous question indicates that violent clashes did occur between the Ebijakara and Ebom communities in January 2006, one report referring to an attack in which “hundreds of Ebijakara indigenes were killed” by people from the Ebom community on 15-17 January 2006.<sup>24</sup> Reporting referred to the “outbreak of hostilities between the people of Ebom Community and their Ebijakara neighbours where all houses and trees were sunk and over 200 people murdered”.<sup>25</sup>

### **4. Please provide an update about the status of Christian/Muslim tensions and conflict in Nigeria. Is this limited to Jos (Plateau State) and surrounding areas in Central Nigeria?**

Sources indicate that Christian/Muslim tensions and conflict in Nigeria largely remain limited to the northern and central states, with significant recent conflict around the city of Jos in Plateau State.

The following excerpt of a report released by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom in April 2010 is representative of reporting:

Since 1999, a disturbingly large number of Nigerians – 12,000, if not more – have been killed in attacks and reprisals between Muslims and Christians. This trend continues: in the past year, two major outbreaks of sectarian violence took place since January 2010 in and around the city of Jos, Plateau State that resulted in as many as 1,000 people being killed. In addition, religiously-motivated violence by an extremist Islamic sect resulted in 900 – 2,000 deaths in several northern states in July 2009. The Jos violence was the most recent in a long line of violent incidents resulting in death and destruction, and instilling a sense of fear within Northern and Central Nigerian communities. The government of Nigeria has done little, if anything, to

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, K. 2010, ‘Community takes case to ICJ’, *The Nation*, 22 November

<http://thenationonline.net/web3/news/19571.html> – Accessed 20 January 2011 – Attachment 16.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, K. 2010, ‘ICC considers petition on sack of Cross River community’, *The Nation*, 15 December

<http://thenationonline.net/web3/news/21709.html> – Accessed 20 January 2011 – Attachment 17.

<sup>23</sup> ‘The Government White Paper on Ediong/Obom-Itiate in print’ (undated), The Official Website of the Cross River State [http://www.crossriverstate.gov.ng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=729:the-government-white-paper-on-ediongobom-itiatie-in-print&catid=143:news-](http://www.crossriverstate.gov.ng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=729:the-government-white-paper-on-ediongobom-itiatie-in-print&catid=143:news-) – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 18.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, K. 2010, ‘ICC considers petition on sack of Cross River community’, *The Nation*, 15 December

<http://thenationonline.net/web3/news/21709.html> – Accessed 20 January 2011 – Attachment 17.

<sup>25</sup> Olaoye, B., Ailemen, T., Moses, T., Kabir, M. and Bakare, J. 2006, ‘Hiccups Trail Census’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Daily Champion*, 21 March <http://allafrica.com/stories/200603210566.html> – Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 19.

address sectarian and communal violence, making no serious effort to investigate or prosecute the perpetrators of the numerous killings and other crimes. Government leaders have failed to heed warning signs of violence, and the federal police have failed to respond effectively and appropriately – or even at all – when violence has erupted. The national legislature has exercised no discernible oversight over either the Ministry of Justice or the National Human Rights Commission to ensure adequate investigation and resolution of religious violence and intolerance. The Human Rights Commission, both by design and in effect, lacks the independence and resources to address these issues.

...Religion is a driving force in the sectarian violence, as a precipitating factor or a proxy for political or social issues.<sup>26</sup>

In November 2010 the US Department of State reported that “[v]iolence, tension, and hostility between Christians and Muslims increased, particularly in the Middle Belt, exacerbated by indigene/settler laws, discriminatory employment practices, and resource competition.”<sup>27</sup> It noted also that the lack of justice and reconciliation after 2008 in Plateau State had facilitated the eruption of communal violence there in January and March 2010, and which was ongoing. Efforts by NGOs and traditional leaders reportedly had achieved only limited success in reducing the violence in their communities.<sup>28</sup>

Recent news media articles indicate that Jos continues to be “plagued by violence between Christians and Muslims”, including bombings on Christmas eve – variously targeting a large market, a Christian area and a road leading to the city’s main mosque – and, in early January 2011, rioting following the deaths of 11 people in violence that appears to have been religiously motivated.<sup>29</sup> Subsequent reports indicate ongoing incidents of religiously-motivated attacks in Plateau State and in the north-east.<sup>30</sup> Reporting additionally comments that the violence in Jos, “though fractured across religious lines, often has more to do with local politics, economics and rights to grazing lands. The government of Plateau state, where Jos is the capital, is controlled by Christian politicians who have blocked Muslims from being legally recognized as citizens. That has locked many out of prized government jobs in a region where the tourism industry and tin mining have collapsed in the last decades”.<sup>31</sup>

Little information was found on the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the south-eastern states, where the community is very predominantly Christian. One report was found, however, of the targeting in the city of Onitsha in Anambra state of Muslim Hausa-speakers from the north by Igbo Christian youths, in retaliation against deaths of Igbo Christians in northern states after the publication of caricatures of Mohamed.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *USCIRF Annual Report 2010 - Countries of Particular Concern: Nigeria*, UNHCR Refworld website, 29 April

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4be2840c6.html> – Accessed 25 January 2011 – Attachment 21.

<sup>27</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2010 Report on International Religious Freedom – Nigeria*, Introduction – Attachment 1.

<sup>28</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2010 Report on International Religious Freedom – Nigeria*, Section II – Attachment 1.

<sup>29</sup> Saka, A. 2011, ‘Rioters set homes ablaze, families hide as new violence strikes restive central Nigeria’, *Associated Press Newswires*, 10 January – Attachment 22.

<sup>30</sup> See for example ‘Central Nigeria attack sparks clash with soldiers: police’ 2011, *Agence France Presse*, 25 January – Attachment 23.

<sup>31</sup> Saka, A. 2011, ‘Rioters set homes ablaze, families hide as new violence strikes restive central Nigeria’, *Associated Press Newswires*, 10 January – Attachment 22.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) 2006, ‘At least 123 killed as anger over cartoons fuels existing tensions’, *ReliefWeb*, 23 February, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/KHII-6MB9TW?OpenDocument> - Accessed 27 January 2011 – Attachment 24.

## Attachments

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<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/144175/Cross-River> – Accessed 25 January 2011.
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