**NAME:** AMADIKE CHIDERA LILIAN

**DEPARTMENT:** COMPUTER ENGINEERING

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**TOPIC:** An essay on Violent Conflict on a Geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

**VIOLENT CONFLICT IN NORTH CENTRAL ZONE OF NIGERIA**

The North Central region has some of the highest levels of violence involving armed communal groups. Communal militias have been involved in over 40% of incidents of political violence in the North Central region and over 73% of conflict-related fatalities. This can be contrasted with national averages in which communal militias were involved in just 17% of all violent events. Armed violence in the North Central region is characterised by extreme volatility: relatively low-levels of conflict are interspersed with sudden spikes, usually occurring around critical junctures such as elections.

In 2001, as many as 1,000 people were killed in the Plateau state capital, Jos, in less than a week in devastating inter-communal tension between ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers.’ In 2004, an episode of inter-communal violence – primarily Muslims and Christians against one another – claimed as many as 700 lives in Plateau before the military intervened. In addition, the region also experiences high rates of violent crime. Nigeria Watch estimates that Plateau State experienced more than 40 deaths by homicide per 100,000 inhabitants between 2006 and 2011: the highest rate in the country.

The North Central region has witnessed sharp spikes in violence surrounding elections and other critical junctures. The federal government has in recent years declared states of emergency in parts of the North Central region in response to high levels of armed violence there. For instance, in January of 2012, a state of emergency was declared in several local government areas in Plateau and Niger states. Most states in the North Central region were won by current president Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 general elections. Niger was won by the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, President Jonathan’s strongest rival

Violent conflict, whether riots or fighting between insurrectional groups and the police, tends to occur at specific flashpoints. Examples are the cities of Kaduna and Zaria, whose populations are religiously and ethnically very mixed, and the very poor states of the far north east, where anti-establishment groups have emerged.

Many factors fuelling these conflicts are common across Nigeria: in particular, the political manipulation of religion and ethnicity and disputes between supposed local groups and “settlers” over distribution of public resources. The failure of the state to assure public order, to contribute to dispute settlement and to implement post-conflict peacebuilding measures is also a factor. Economic decline and absence of employment opportunities, especially as inequality grows, likewise drives conflict. As elsewhere in Nigeria, the north suffers from a potent mix of economic malaise and contentious, community-based distribution of public resources.

Northern Nigeria is little understood by those in the south, still less by the international community. Too often it is viewed as part of bigger rivalries in a putative West-Islam divide. All – from Iran to Christian evangelical preachers – need to be more careful of what they say and whom they support. Officials in the West need to put some of their fears about radical Islam into a much more Nigerian perspective. Reformist movements – highly diverse and fragmented – have contributed in many positive ways to debates over governance, corruption and rule of law. While some harbour real hostility to the West, for others criticising the U.S. is really a way of expressing frustration with Nigeria’s secular state and its multiple problems.