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1.2.5. Student cults

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last updated: February 2019

[*Targeting*, 2.3]

Student cults in Nigeria, also referred to as 'university cults' or 'confraternities', resemble criminal gangs. Some of the most well-known cults are the Black Axe and Eiye.

Student cults are characterised by violent initiation rites and conduct illegal activities such as: killings, human trafficking, drug trafficking, smuggling, extortions, kidnapping, forced recruitment, etc. Approximately 1 863 deaths are likely to be connected to student cults between 2006 and 2014. Cult-related violence in 2017 reportedly resulted in 442 fatalities and 290 victims of kidnapping.

Political parties often recruit cult members and use them to kill or attack political opponents or to exercise violence during elections [*Targeting*, 2.3.3].

Some sources report that it is 'extremely difficult' to leave a cult after being initiated. Persons who quit the confraternities or cults may be killed, out of fear of revealing the cult's secrets [*Targeting*, 3.11.1.1].

Student cults mostly operate in the southern states of Nigeria and are particularly strong in Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Edo.

Student cults may be considered actors of persecution or serious harm in specific situations.

The reach of a specific non-State actor and their ability to trace and target the applicant depend on the individual case. The individual power positions of the applicant and the actor of persecution or serious harm should be assessed, taking into consideration their social status, wealth, connections, gender, level of education, etc.

Finally, it should be noted that persecution or serious harm by non-State actors has to be assessed in light of the availability of protection according to Article 7 QD.

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