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Tensions high in Nigeria after Christians killed in bombings

Islamic extremist Boko Haram sect attacks churches in Borno, Plateau states

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (28.10.2010) / HRWF (29.10.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Tensions continued to mount in the Christian community in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state in northern Nigeria, following the killing of a Baptist pastor and five other Christians on Christmas Eve.

The Rev. Bulus Marwa and the other Christians were killed in the Dec. 24 attacks on Victory Baptist Church in Alemderi and a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation in Sinimari by the outlawed Islamic Boko Haram sect opposed to Western education.

Those killed at the Baptist church, which was set ablaze, included choir members Philip Luka, 22, and Paul Mathew, 21, as well as 50-year-old Christopher Balami and Yohana Adamu. Philip Sopso, a 60-year-old a security guard, was killed at the COCIN church

while 25 other persons were said to have been injured during the serial attacks by the Islamic group.

"It is sad that when Christians were supposed to be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, some people, out of wickedness, would come to perpetrate such evil," said Borno State Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria the Rev. Yuguda Ndirmva.

The Boko Haram members reportedly first stormed the COCIN church in two vehicles and detonated bombs that shattered the gate of the worship center and killed the security guard.

Many Christians have taken refuge to avoid further attacks as soldiers and police keep watch at churches and other strategic locations in the state.

Danjuma Akawu, who survived the attack on the Baptist church, said "they hacked the two choir members using knives and petrol bomb before heading to the pastor's residence, where he was killed."

Borno Gov. Ali Modu Sheriff said he had alerted police to the possibility of an attack on churches during Christmas.

"It is very unfortunate and sad for the Christian community to be attacked and people killed without any genuine cause," Sheriff said.

Speaking during a visit to the Baptist church on Saturday (Dec. 25), the governor noted that the attack on the Christian community was an attempt by Boko Haram to create conflict between Christians and Muslims in the state. Several Boko Haram bomb blasts in Christian areas of Jos on Dec. 24 that killed scores of people were said to be an attempt to create the same inter-religious conflict.

Borno state, in northeastern Nigeria, is largely populated by Muslims who have disowned some activities of Boko Haram as contrary to Islam.

Police Commissioner Mohammed Abubakar admitted a security lapse on the part of his divisional police officers, whom he said had been told to watch out for Boko Haram members.

The activities of the Islamic extremist Boko Haram, whose names means "Western education is sin," were crushed by police in 2009 with the arrest of many of its members and the killing of its leader.

In retaliation, the group had killed policemen and was recently responsible for a prison break to set free its members in the Borno state capital.

Worried about the safety of Christians in Borno state, the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, asked the federal government to curb the growing trend of terrorism in parts of the country.

"We can no longer allow this group of disgruntled elements to get away with these acts of terrorism in Nigeria," he said.

The general superintendent of Deeper Life Bible Church, Pastor William Kumuyi, demanded the arrest and prosecution of the Boko Haram members and others to serve as a deterrent.

"A situation in which feuds easily lead to the burning of churches and the endless killings of church ministers and innocent citizens is an abhorrent trend which must not be

allowed to continue," Pastor Kumuyi said. "The initiative rests on the doorsteps of the security agencies to bring this unfortunate trend to an end."

Northern Christians and Muslims in renewed violence

Konye Obaji Ori

Afrik-News (15.07.2010) / HRWF (16.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - According to Taraba state, police commissioner Aliyu Musa, fighting erupted between Christian and Muslim youths on Tuesday, leaving at least five people dead.

The police moved into Wukari in Taraba on Wednesday morning, bringing an edgy calm to the community after several mosques and churches had been burnt down.

"As you have just seen, about a unit of mobile and general duty policemen are now on their way to Wukari. I am sending these mobile men there to increase the strength of the ones on ground so as to bring the situation under control," Mr. Musa was quoted by reporters.

Trouble began after a mosque at the divisional police headquarters located in the local government council area headquarters complex was demolished by some Christian youths, according to the police commissioner Musa.

This led to a reprisal action by other Muslims, leading to substantial destruction of lives and properties, as local reported accounts of at least 15 wounded at public and private hospitals.

The riot reportedly led to the disturbance of traffic across major state and federal road networks.

Threat of new Islamic sect violence

The Authorities put a dusk-till-dawn curfew in place in hope of stopping retaliatory attacks after a radical Islamic sect made threats to launch a new wave of violence.

The Taraba State Police Command mobilized about three trucks of mobile policemen fully armed to the trouble zone.

This comes after Abubakar Shekau, leader of a Nigerian Islamist sect involved in deadly violence last year and thought to have been killed, posted a statement on a jihadist web site saying "jihad has just begun."

Shekau whose sect, known as the Boko Haram, launched a crusade of violence in northern Nigeria last year in a bid to establish an Islamist state was thought dead by authorities until April this year.

The Boko Haram violent uprising which took place in July 2009 was stopped by the Nigerian army. At least 700 sect members were killed.

Since January, fighting between Christians and Muslims in central Nigeria has left more than 500 dead.

Nigeria's 150 million people are divided into a Christian-dominated south and a Muslim-held north.

Since its return to democracy in 1999, the most populated African country, has experienced waves of religious violence between the two faiths over religious and political grounds.

Nigeria: 5 die in new religious violence

Lynn Adda

AP (14.07.2010) / HRWF (15.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - An attack on a mosque by youths in eastern Nigeria erupted into bloodshed, leaving at least five people dead as religious violence continued between Christians and Muslims in Africa's most populous nation, witnesses and police said Wednesday.

The violence began Tuesday in the community of Wukari in Taraba state, police commissioner Aliyu Musa told The Associated Press. There, Christians upset with a mosque in their neighborhood burned the house of worship to the ground, the commissioner said.

Street fighting erupted between Christian and Muslim youths, leaving at least five people dead, witnesses said. A local reporter told the AP that he counted at least 15 wounded at one public hospital, while being told others sought treatment at private clinics.

By the end of the violence, several mosques and churches had been burned, witnesses said. Wednesday morning, security forces moved into Wukari, bringing an uneasy calm to the community. Authorities put a dusk-til-dawn curfew in place in hope of stopping retaliatory attacks.

Nigeria, a nation of 150 million people, is divided between the Christian-dominated south and the Muslim-held north. Since democracy took hold in the oil-rich nation in 1999, ensuing waves of religious violence between the two faiths have claimed the lives of thousands in the last decade over religious and political friction.

This year alone, fighting between Christians and Muslims in central Nigeria has left more than 500 dead.

Meanwhile, a radical Islamic sect has made threats to launch a new wave of violence while sending messages of support to al-Qaida in Iraq and threatening the United States.

Muslim youths burn church buildings and pastor's home

Attack in Kano state said to stem from revenge by converts to Islam, land dispute

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (21.05.2010) / HRWF (31.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Scores of Muslim youths on Wednesday (May 19) besieged church property in Kano state in northern Nigeria, destroying two church buildings and a pastor's residence.

One of the buildings and the pastor's house were set ablaze on the premises of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) at Kwasam, in the Kiru Local Government area, while another building under construction was demolished. Youths reportedly numbering more than 100 in the predominantly Muslim area stormed the church grounds.

"The problem started when some Christian youths of ECWA church were converted to Islam," the Rev. Lado Abdul, chairman of ECWA district in Kano, told Compass. "They swore that the ECWA church would not remain in the area, as they would do everything possible to chase Christians out from Kiru."

The ECWA pastor whose house was demolished, Gambo Mato, has found shelter in another Christian's home.

No life was lost during or after the incident as police and State Security Service officers intervened, and traditional rulers, religious leaders and government officials held an urgent meeting to quell potential skirmishes and establish security.

Abdul, however, lamented the denial of rights to Christians in Kano by area Muslims.

"Here in Kano, nobody gives you land to build a church," he said. "The old churches built before now are being demolished for reasons no one can easily grasp. We have taken our complaint to Sarki Kano [traditional emir of Kano] Alhaji Ado Bayero, and he assured us that something would be done about it. We are looking to the state government to come to our rescue."

Kano State Police Commissioner Mohammed Gana said that the attack on the church buildings grew out of a land dispute.

"The old church was a mud house, and the ECWA people wanted to rebuild it with blocks," Gana said. "In the process, there was a disagreement, but we moved in to ensure peace and order."

Four suspects have been arrested, and an investigation continues, the police chief said.

Elsewhere in Kano state, in Banaka of the Takai Local Government Area, a Baptist church was reportedly demolished on Saturday (May 15).

Kano state, one of 12 states in Nigeria where sharia (Islamic law) is in effect, has been the site of periodic Islamic aggression against the minority Christian community. Last year, when an Islamic extremist sect known as Boko Haram instigated rioting in Bauchi state that killed at least 12 Christians, the firestorm of violence spread to Kano state as well as Borno and Yobe states.

In 2008, hundreds of Muslims took to the streets of Kano city on April 20, attacking Christians and their shops and setting vehicles on fire based on claims that a Christian had blasphemed Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Thousands of Christians were trapped in church buildings until police could disperse the assailants.

An unidentified Christian was said to have written an inscription on a shop wall that disparaged the prophet of Islam. Muslims at a market in the Sabon Garia area of the city reportedly attacked the Christian, whom police rescued and took to the area police station.

Muslims in large numbers soon trooped to the police station, threatening to set it ablaze unless officers released the Christian to be stoned to death in accordance with sharia, sources said.

Two Church of Christ in Nigeria journalists killed in Jos

Other Christians murdered in area that continues to be wracked by violence

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (27.04.2010) / HRWF (29.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - The killing of Christians in Jos, Plateau state in Nigeria continued over the weekend with two journalists and five other persons falling victim to Muslim youth gangs.

Nathan S. Dabak, an assistant editor at a newspaper of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) called The Light Bearer, and Sunday Gyang Bwede, a reporter at the publication, were stabbed to death on Saturday (April 24) at Gado-Bako in Jos North Local Government Area along with an unidentified motorcyclist.

"The staff of the church were murdered in cold blood by some Hausa Muslim youths," the Rev. Pandang Yamsat, president of COCIN, told Compass today. "This is clear because they have been using the hand phones of the deceased journalists and boasting that they are the ones that killed them."

The young Muslim men have been boldly answering calls to the cell phones of the deceased journalists, he said; when a friend of Dabak called his cell phone number, an unknown voice responded, "We have killed all of them – you can do your worst!"

Dabak, 36, and the 39-year-old Bwede had left their office on Saturday morning and were on their way to interview local politician Bulus Kaze when they fell into the hands of young Muslim men, Yamsat said.

The church started a search for the two Christians that day but did not discover their bodies until about noon on Sunday at the mortuary of Jos University Teaching Hospital, he said. He added that the church was eagerly waiting for results of a police investigation.

"The security team of the church has been communicating with the police, but they are yet to make any headway on this unfortunate incident," he said.

Burial of the slain journalists is scheduled for Friday (April 30).

In his statement on Monday (April 26), Yamsat lamented that "while efforts have been tailored towards the return of peace to the state by the military Special Task Force, it is regrettable that the state is confronted with a spate of killings."

"The church is still mourning the death of its pastor and his wife killed in Boto, Bauchi state," Yamsat said, in reference to the April 13 kidnapping and murder of the Rev. Ishaku Kadah, 48, and his 45-year-old wife Selina. "It is sad that it should again be left to face another brutal murder of two of their staff."

The state branch of the Nigerian Union of Journalists also condemned the circumstances that led to the death of the two journalists, expressing deep concern over what it described as "a series of attacks on its members in recent times in the course of carrying out their legitimate duties."

Four other Christians also were killed on Saturday (April 24) in the Dutse Uku district of Jos' Nasarawa Gwom area in a revenge attack following the discovery of the corpse of a teenage Muslim who had been missing. Their names were not released at press time.

The four Christians reportedly died, three of them stabbed to death, when hundreds of Muslim youths rampaged throughout the area in protest.

Earlier, police reportedly exhumed eight bodies from shallow graves in a predominantly Christian village near Jos. The discovery of the bodies brought to 15 the number of corpses found in three days in an area fraught with Muslim aggression that has left hundreds of Christians dead.

Jos has become a flash-point for ethnic and religious tensions in Plateau state, which is located between Nigeria's mainly Muslim north and Christian south. Previously hundreds of Christian villagers were struck with machetes and burned to death on March 7 in Dogo Nahawa, Zot and Rastat, three villages in Jos South and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas.

On March 17, Muslim Fulani herdsmen assaulted two Christian villages in Plateau state, killing 13 persons, including a pregnant woman and children. In attacks presumably over disputed property but with a level of violence characteristic of jihadist method and motive, men in military camouflage and others in customary clothing also burned 20 houses in Byei and Baten villages, in the Riyom Local Government Area of the state, about 45 kilometers (29 miles) from Jos.

On Jan. 17, two pastors and 46 other Christians were killed in an outbreak of violence in Jos triggered when Muslim youths attacked a Catholic church. Police estimated over 300 lives were lost in subsequent clashes, in which 10 church buildings were burned.

Pastor, wife killed in northern Nigeria

Suspected Islamists kidnap, slay couple in Bauchi state

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (20.04.2010) / HRWF (22.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Suspected Islamic extremists last week abducted and killed a Church of Christ in Nigeria pastor and his wife in Boto village, Bauchi state in northern Nigeria.

The Rev. Ishaku Kadah, 48, and his 45-year-old wife Selina were buried on Saturday (April 17) after unidentified assailants reportedly whisked them from their church headquarters home on Tuesday (April 13) and killed them. Their burnt bodies were found hours later.

On Jan. 22, suspected Islamic extremists had set fire to their church building days after Christians displaced by violence in Plateau state had taken refuge on the church premises.

"This is yet another case of unprovoked killing of Christians, which we condemn, and demand that the law enforcement agents must fish out the perpetrators of this act," Bishop Musa Fula, state chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Bauchi state, told Compass.

Police have reportedly arrested two suspects and have launched a man-hunt for several other accomplices. Authorities are not releasing the names of the suspects.

Boto is located in the predominantly Christian Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area of Bauchi state, which has a history of Muslim attacks on Christians.

"Police claim they are working on it and we want to believe them," Fula added. "We need assurance that our people are safe. We will soon meet later on the matter to decide our next line of action on these kind of attacks."

The murdered couple's son, Simeon Kadah, said an eyewitness who had come to the church premises to collect some rented chairs saw men dragging the pastor and his wife out of their house. Kadah said the men asked the eyewitness if he was a Muslim, and when he told them that he was, they told him to leave the area and tell no one what he had seen.

The Rev. Ladi Thompson of the Macedonian Initiative, an organization fighting anti-Christian persecution, decried the killing of the pastor and his wife, saying it is an indication of the great dangers Christians are exposed to in the predominantly Muslim north.

"This kind of mindless killing follows the same pattern that we have been campaigning against, which many state governments in northern Nigeria are not paying due attention to," Thompson said. "The government cannot afford to continue to pay lip service to protecting Christians when some people in the name of religion can take the laws into their hands. Unless we get to the root of cases like this, there will be no end to it."

Following attacks on Christians near Jos in Plateau state in January and March, sporadic killings of Christians reportedly continue. Previously hundreds of Christian villagers were struck with machetes and burned to death on March 7 in Dogo Nahawa, Zot and Rastat, three villages in Jos South and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas.

On March 17, Muslim Fulani herdsmen assaulted two Christian villages in Plateau state, killing 13 persons, including a pregnant woman and children. In attacks presumably over disputed property but with a level of violence characteristic of jihadist method and motive, men in military camouflage and others in customary clothing also burned 20 houses in Byei and Baten villages, in the Riyom Local Government Area of the state, about 45 kilometers (29 miles) from Jos.

On Jan. 17, two pastors and 46 other Christians were killed in an outbreak of violence in Jos triggered when Muslim youths attacked a Catholic church. Police estimated over 300 lives were lost in subsequent clashes, in which 10 church buildings were burned.

Second wave of attacks near Jos, Nigeria leaves 13 Christians dead

Muslim Fulani herdsmen strike two more villages, slaughtering women and children

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (17.03.2010) / HRWF (18.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Less than two weeks after a massive attack in Nigeria that killed 500 Christians, Muslim Fulani herdsmen today unleashed more horrific violence on two Christian villages in Plateau state, killing 13 persons, including a pregnant woman and children.

In attacks presumably over disputed property but with a level of violence characteristic of jihadist method and motive, men in military camouflage and others in customary clothing also burned 20 houses in Byei and Baten villages, in the Riyom Local Government Area of the state, about 45 kilometers (29 miles) from the state capital, Jos.

Christians in neighboring villages are living in fear of possible attacks by the herdsmen, who have not been deterred by the joint military and police security team enforcing curfew in the state. The ethnic Berom Christians, who live as farmers, have long faced off with Fulani nomads who graze their cattle on the Beroms' land.

The slaughter comes after a similar attack on March 7 on Dogo Nahawa, Zot and Rastat, three villages in Jos South and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas where hundreds of villagers were struck with machetes and burned to death.

"The assailants armed with dangerous weapons attacked the two communities simultaneously at about 1 a.m. on Wednesday, March 17," Brig. Gen. Donald Oji said in a press statement, adding that timely deployment of troops averted further carnage. "Seven of the assailants have been arrested, while troops are still on the trail of more of them. Items recovered from the assailants include three locally made short guns with cartridges, bow and arrows, machetes, knives and cutlasses."

State Gov. Jonah Jang condemned the killings, alleging that some unnamed persons were fueling misunderstanding among communities in conflict. Because the style of killing is typical of jihadist fundamentalists, Christian leaders suspect Islamic extremists are encouraging the attacks, throwing religious gas on low-burning land and ethnic conflicts.

Dalyop Nyango Mandung, a survivor of the attack whose 90-year-old mother, Ngo Hwo Dongo, was killed in her room, told newsmen that the villagers were awakened by gunshots from the Muslim herdsmen who were barricading their houses. Mandung, however, distinguished the assailants in military fatigues from the Fulani herders.

"We saw them in military uniforms, about two of them were in military uniform and the Fulani were in their normal clothes," Mandun reportedly said. "My mother was the only one killed in the family."

Another survivor, Kachollom Pam Dauda, who is pregnant, told Nigerian media that she was lucky to have escaped the killers. She also described the men in military uniform as distinct from the herders, saying, "The killers came and first shot, and the Fulani were machete-ing people."

"I climbed the roof of the house and held to the wood," she reportedly said. "It was painful more so that I am pregnant. I saw the killers kill my two sisters-in-law, Chundung and Kangyang – they could not escape. I saw as they were being butchered and slain."

Dauda said she dared not make any movement that would attract the attention of the killers.

"After they killed my sisters-in-law, they sat at the back of our house and were saying they would still come back in two days to finish us in the village," she reportedly said. "I saw two soldiers. They were speaking English and were saying, 'Come let's go.' The Fulanis were more than 20 in number. When they left, my husband's uncle, Yohanna, came crying saying, 'They have killed people in the next compound.'"

In the March 7 attack, the ethnic Berom victims also included many women and children killed with machetes by rampaging Fulani herdsmen. About 75 houses were burned. State Information Commissioner Gregory Yenlong confirmed that about 500 persons were killed in the attacks.

Christian leaders said that in the March 7 attack, eyewitnesses said the Fulani Muslims were chanting "Allah Akbar" as they broke into homes and slashed men, women and children.

Gov. Jang said word of the new attacks challenged everyone's strength to endure.

"It gets to a stage when one remains strong, but when you receive the news of fresh attacks, you get broken before you recover again," he said. "I have total faith in God because I am a child of God; and because I know there is nothing that happens that God is not aware particularly when it happens to His children. I have talked to God that whatever sin we have committed on the Plateau He should have mercy on us."

Hundreds slaughtered in Nigeria religious violence

Ahmed Saka and Jon Gambrell (, March 8, 2010)

AP (08.03.2010) / HRWF (12.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Rioters armed with machetes slaughtered more than 200 people including a 4-day-old infant, residents said, less than two months after sectarian violence in the volatile region left more than 300 dead.

One aid worker said Monday it was difficult to tell how many people had been killed because some bodies were charred beyond recognition.

The violence in three mostly Christian villages Sunday appeared to be reprisal attacks following the January unrest in Jos when most of the victims were Muslims, said Red Cross spokesman Robin Waubo. State officials did not comment on what may have prompted the latest attacks.

Plateau State spokesman Gregory Yenlong said officials would conduct mass burials for the victims on Monday.

The bodies of the dead lined dusty streets in three villages south of the regional capital of Jos, local journalists and a civil rights group said Sunday. They said at least 200 bodies had been counted by Sunday afternoon.

The bodies of children tangled with each other in a local morgue, including a diaper-clad toddler. Another young victim appeared to have been scalped, while others had severed hands and feet. One female victim in the morgue appeared to have been stripped below the waist, but later covered by a strip of black cloth.

Mark Lipdo, a program coordinator for the Stefanos Foundation, a Christian aid group, confirmed 93 dead in Dogo Nahawa village alone.

"These are the ones we know, but there are corpses charred beyond recognition," he said.

The youngest was just 3 months old, Lipdo said. Residents there also said the dead included a 4-day-old infant.

The killings represent the latest religious violence in an area once known as Nigeria's top tourist destination, adding to the tally of thousands already killed in the last decade in the name of religious and political ambitions.

Rioting in September 2001 killed more than 1,000 people and Muslim-Christian battles killed up to 700 people in 2004. More than 300 residents died during a similar uprising in 2008.

Jos lies in Nigeria's "middle belt," where dozens of ethnic groups mingle in a band of fertile and hotly contested land separating the Muslim north from the predominantly Christian south.

Muslims have complained about being denied jobs and other benefits in Jos by the Christian-dominated government. However, many Muslims also operate shops and businesses in a nearby town where the tourist trade has dried up and the surrounding tin mines have been abandoned, stoking fears for Christians about retaliation from Muslim neighbors.

Jos has been under a dusk-til-dawn curfew enforced by the military since January's religious-based violence. It was not clear how the attackers managed to elude the military curfew early Sunday.

Acting President Goodluck Jonathan said security agencies would be stationed along Plateau state's borders to keep outsiders from coming in with more weapons and fighters.

"(We will) undertake strategic initiatives to confront and defeat these roving bands of killers," he said in a statement. "While it is too early to state categorically what is responsible for this renewed wave of violence, we want to inform Nigerians that the security services are on top of the situation."

On Monday, an Associated Press reporter saw nearly 100 soldiers in tan military fatigues and bulletproof vests standing near armored cars at an entrance into Jos. The street was mostly deserted but soldiers appeared tense, holding Kalashnikov rifles at their hips and pointing them at passing cars.

More than 600 people had fled to a makeshift camp that still held victims from January's violence, said Red Cross official Adamu Abubakar. He expected more to come, putting an even bigger strain on the already limited humanitarian aid for those fleeing the violence. In Dogo Nahawa, three miles (five kilometers) south of Jos, those who survived claimed their attackers shouted at them in Hausa and Fulani - two local languages used by Muslims.

Yenlong, the state government spokesman, also said police were seeking to arrest Saleh Bayari, the regional leader of the Fulanis, because Bayari's comments incited the attack. He offered no other details.

But the chairman of the local Fulani organization denied that his people were involved in the attack.

Nigerian military units began surrounding the affected villages Sunday afternoon, Waubo, the Red Cross spokesman, said. He said the agency did not know how many people may have died in the fighting but workers have been sent to local morgues and hospitals to check.

Arrests made over mass arson of churches in northern Nigeria

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (26.02.2010) / HRWF (27.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Several arrests have been made following the burning of at least seven churches in Northern Nigeria's Jigawa State by a mob protesting the death of a Muslim driver at the hands of traffic police.

The commercial tractor driver had failed to stop in Kazaure Town when ordered to do so on 20 February, and was hospitalised after being chased and severely assaulted by a Muslim traffic policeman. The driver died from his injuries the following evening.

On hearing of this death, an angry mob attacked a police station, but after being beaten back, subsequently directed their anger at local churches, destroying buildings belonging to the Anglican, Apostolic, Catholic, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Word of Faith, Deeper Life and Assemblies of God denominations.

Anglican Bishop Yusuf Lamu told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that the Anglican building had recently been renovated following an earlier bout of violence and was due for re-dedication in April. He also said the churches were targeted without real cause: "They just view the Church as the enemy, not that the church has done anything".

Other local sources say tension had increased in the area following earlier violence in Jos, Plateau State in January 2010. However, Bishop Lamu insisted that universal condemnation of the violence by local authorities, including the Emir of Kazaure and the Jigawa State government, coupled with the arrests of suspects, had helped to lessen tensions. Rev. Dr. Ibrahim Damina, chairman of the Jigawa Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), concurred: "Fortunately no-one died and the tension is finished, but continue to pray for us."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "It is unfortunate that once again churches were targeted for violence following an incident that clearly had nothing to do with them. However, we commend the strong response by the Jigawa State authorities and the swift arrest of perpetrators. We urge them to ensure that justice runs its full course, that those who lost properties during this violence are swiftly compensated, and that efforts are made to ensure such incidents no longer occur".

Christians in Nigeria decry police inaction in church burnings

Zamfara state assailants emboldened by lack of prosecution in Jos mayhem, CAN leader says

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (26.02.2010) / HRWF (27.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The head of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Zamfara state told Compass that he was disappointed in the lack of response by state police to recent church burnings by Muslim youths.

"It is unfortunate that there has been no response from the police, and even the state governor has refused to meet with us," said the acting state chairman of CAN, the Rev. Edwin Okpara.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God building in Tudun Wada was partly burnt on Jan. 25, and Christian Faith Bible church and the Living Faith Foundation Chapel, both in Gusau, were partly burnt in attacks on Jan. 20 and 24 respectively. Zamfara state, one of the predominantly Muslim states in northern Nigeria, was the first in the country to implement Islamic law (sharia).

In the petition dated Jan. 26, CAN stated that the church burnings came in the aftermath of "a grand plot to unleash mayhem on churches and Christians in the state due to the religious clash in Jos, Plateau state."

The association alleged that those who attacked the Zamfara churches were emboldened because officials made no serious move to arrest those who carried out the Jos attacks. Two pastors and 46 other Christians were killed in the outbreak of violence in Jos on Jan. 17, triggered when Muslim youths attacked a Catholic church; 10 church buildings were burned, and police estimated more than 300 lives were lost in the clash.

"We are seriously disturbed by the restlessness and panic these attacks have created among the Christian community and ask that every necessary and urgent step be taken by your command to secure the lives of both Christians and Muslims in the state as citizens of Nigeria," the CAN petition states. "Despite these attacks and provocation, the church and Christians as peaceful people have remained calm and have no plans to retaliate, but [we are] appealing to you to act and protect our interest."

The State Police Command was not available for comment on the CAN request.

Okpara lamented that Christians in the state have been suffering in silence with little means of drawing attention to their plight.

"The level of persecution in Zamfara is alarming, more than in any other state in the country," Okpara said. "Not even in Sokoto or Kano are Christians subjected to the kind of discrimination we are subjected to."

He said it was impossible to get land to build churches in Zamfara state; Christians are forced to sign an understanding binding them to refrain from using land in the state for church buildings.

"We are more or less operating underground churches in the state," he said. "The present state government has turned out to be more anti-Christian than the former government in the state, which introduced the sharia law."

Leaders of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) on Tuesday (Feb. 23) decried cases of persecution and discrimination against Christians and called on the federal government to put an end to it. Virtually all churches in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria have been refused certificates of occupancy for their buildings, they said.

"There seems to be an unwritten law that churches are not welcomed in the northern part of the country," the PFN leaders noted in a statement.

Chilling messages sent before killings

Jon Gambrell

AP (27.01.2010) / HRWF (28.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Chilling text messages urged both Christians and Muslims to commit violence during rioting that left more than 300 people dead, a human rights organization said Wednesday, with one message reading: "Kill them before they kill you."

Shehu Sani, president of the Civil Rights Congress in Nigeria, said his group has collected about 150 text messages that were sent before and during the violence in Jos.

Even as the military kept an uneasy calm in the central Nigerian town, another pastor said Wednesday that agitators are sending new text messages to those in surrounding communities to re-ignite the sectarian violence.

The messages gave readers addresses to mosques and churches, suggesting that some structures be set ablaze, he said. The texts also offered instructions on what weapons to use and how to dispose of bodies, he said.

"Slaughter them before they slaughter you. Kill them before they kill you," one message read, according to Sani. "Throw them in the pit before they throw you. Encircle and suppress them before they encircle and suppress you."

The chance of prosecuting those sending the messages appears to be small. In Nigeria, the government does not require cellular phone owners to register their SIM cards - the portable memory chips that tell a phone what its number is and what carrier it uses.

Sectarian violence in this region of Nigeria has left thousands dead over the past decade. The latest outbreak came despite the Nigerian government's efforts to quell religious extremism in the West African country.

What started the killings in Jos remains unclear. A state police commissioner initially said the violence began after Muslim youths set a Christian church ablaze, but Muslim leaders denied that. Muslims say it began with an argument over the rebuilding of a Muslim home in a predominantly Christian neighborhood that had been destroyed in November 2008.

The text messages inciting people to violence began as the unrest spread across Jos last week, Sani said.

"The violence started at a low scale and in every measure the text messages played a role in spreading rumors and inciting people," Sani said. "They reacted violently based on the kind of information they received from their text messages."

In a predominantly Muslim village south of Jos, searchers discovered the bodies of men, women and children shoved three-at-a-time into communal wells and sewage pits.

Sani said the text messages suggested attackers take up locally made weapons like bows and arrows, machetes, scythes and axes. Many of the victims' bodies bore signs of being attacked with those weapons, he said.

Even after the military brought the city under control, text messages circulating as far away as the Nigerian capital of Abuja still sought to restart the violence between the two faiths.

The Rev. Joseph Hayab, an official with the Christian Association of Nigeria in the north, said text messages in northern Nigeria warned that the state government in Jos wanted to cut off water supplies to Muslims. Another warned Christians not to buy from Muslim street vendors as "those foods have been poisoned," Hayab said.

Some text messages bore the names of low-level church and mosque officials, though Hayab said agitators likely used the names to sow discord. The reverend said he called Christian religious leaders across northern Nigeria about the hoax text messages and many warned people not to trust the fake messages.

"The purpose was just to create chaos in the community," Hayab said.

While the violence may not be new to the region, Sani said the killings appeared to be the first where text messages played such a large role in Nigeria.

Sani said it would be impossible to trace the messages back, though he said police received many of the same messages during their investigation. Emmanuel Ojukwu, a national police spokesman, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

"Unfortunately with this kind of thing, it is not possible for anyone to pinpoint who is sending these kind of messages," Sani said. "They can buy it on the street, use it and throw it away."

Death toll of Christians in Jos, Nigeria clash hits 48

Outbreak of violence in Plateau state results in burning of 10 church buildings

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (27.01.2010) / HRWF (28.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Two pastors and 46 other Christians have been confirmed killed in the outbreak of violence 10 days ago in Jos, Plateau state in Nigeria, according to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

In the religious clash, triggered when Muslim youths on Jan. 17 attacked a Catholic church, 10 church buildings were burned and 27 Christians are still missing, CAN officials said at a press conference in Jos today. Police estimate over 300 lives were lost in the clash.

The Plateau state CAN chairman, the Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, said the CAN Directorate of Research has carefully investigated the clash "without any sentiment and come out with a factual account."

Kaigama said flashpoint areas where clashes have repeatedly occurred should be identified and security personnel deployed.

Police said violence was triggered by an unprovoked attack by Muslim youths on worshippers at the St. Michael's Catholic Church in Nasarawa Gwong, in the Jos North Local Government Area. Burned buildings included the Christ Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God Church, three branches of the Church of Christ in Nigeria and two buildings of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Christian leaders said.

The ECWA on Saturday (Jan. 23) reported that some of its members were missing and appealed to security agencies to help locate their whereabouts.

"Many of our members whose houses were burnt have to date not be found, despite all efforts by the church and their relatives to find their bodies or know their whereabouts," said the Rev. Anthony Farinto, national president of the ECWA. "ECWA suspects strongly that many of the dead bodies hurriedly buried in mass graves by the Muslims included some of its members who were murdered within the Muslim neighborhoods."

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) accused the state General Officer Commanding (GOC), Major-Gen. Salleh Maina, and some soldiers of taking sides in the clash.

"Soldiers were seen in some parts of Jos watching Muslim youths shooting Christians and burning places without any efforts to stop them," read a PFN a press statement.

The process of selecting GOCs nationwide should be open and brought under the supervision of the National Assembly, as the choice of GOC by one man does "not augur well for the peaceful co-existence of the nation," according to the PFN.

The PFN urged the state government to form an Anti-Religious Riot Vigilante Group "whose officials should be well trained in surveillance, intelligence, security and brute self-defense as the first response group to any uprising before the arrival of the police to quell any uprising and save senseless killings."

The Rev. Chuwang Avou, secretary of the state chapter of CAN, said the crisis broke out when Muslim youths pursued a woman into a church during worship on Sunday, wreaking havoc on the service. A Muslim group in the area, however, dismissed claims that Muslim youths ignited the tensions. They accused Christian youths of stopping a Muslim from rebuilding his house.

State Commissioner of Police Greg Anyating stated that Muslim youths were to blame for setting off the violence.

The violence comes at a time of a leadership vacuum in Nigeria, with illness requiring Muslim President Umaru Yar'Adua to leave the country on Nov. 23 to seek treatment in Saudi Arabia.

The same area suffered on Nov. 28-29, 2008, when murderous rioting sparked by Muslim attacks on Christians and their property left six pastors dead, at least 500 other people killed and 40 churches destroyed, according to church leaders. More than 25,000 persons were displaced in the two days of violence.

What began as outrage over suspected vote fraud in local elections quickly hit the religious fault line as angry Muslims took aim at Christian sites rather than at political targets. Police and troops reportedly killed about 400 rampaging Muslims in an effort to quell the unrest, and Islamists shot, slashed or stabbed to death more than 100 Christians.

Sectarian violence in Jos, a volatile mid-point where the predominantly Muslim north meets the mainly Christian south, left more than 1,000 people dead in 2001. Another 700 people were killed in sectarian outbreaks of violence in 2004. Located in Nigeria's central region between the Muslim-majority north and the largely Christian south, Plateau state is home to various Christian ethnic groups co-existing uneasily with Muslim Hausa settlers.

Anglican Archbishop kidnapped in southern Nigeria

Gunmen abduct Edo state chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria after service

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (26.01.2010) / HRWF (27.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Gunmen are still holding the Anglican archbishop of Benin diocese in southern Nigeria's Edo state after abducting him on Sunday (Jan. 24).

Peter Imasuen, who is also the state chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), was abducted in front of his official residence on his way back from a church service. The kidnapers are reportedly demanding \$750,000 for his release.

The armed kidnapers reportedly followed the archbishop from the St. Matthew Cathedral to his residence, where they dragged him out of his car and took him to an unknown location.

Executive members of CAN led by the Rev. Richard Ofere met with Edo Gov. Adams Oshiomhole yesterday on the abduction of the bishop; they declined to speak to news media but are believed to be working with family members and government officials on the matter.

Gov. Oshiomhole decried the kidnapping, which he blamed on the federal government's withdrawal of soldiers from a state joint security program code-named, "Operation Thunderstorm" designed to help thwart militant violence and kidnapers.

He promised to meet officials of the president's office on the need to increase security in the state and ensure that the bishop is released soon. Muslim President Umaru Yar'Adua left the country on Nov. 23 to seek treatment in Saudi Arabia, leading some to speculate on a leadership vacuum in the country.

"I feel I have failed as a governor to protect the lives of our people, but whatever we have to do will be done," Gov. Oshiomhole said. "I have sent for all those who should know that everybody must do what needs to be done. We can never surrender to criminals."

The identity of the kidnapers was not clear, but in recent years abducting top public figures for ransom has become common in the South-South and South-Eastern zones of the country, where militant groups have been campaigning against the poor level of development of the area.

Armed groups seeking a larger share of oil revenues for local residents have attacked oil installations in southern Nigeria since 2006. One major group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), declared an open-ended ceasefire last October.

The cease-fire was meant to open the way for talk with authorities, but MEND recently said it was "reviewing its indefinite ceasefire announced on Sunday, Oct. 9, 2009 and will announce its position on or before Jan. 30, 2010."

In the past four years, hundreds of foreign and local oil workers have been kidnapped in the region, with many being released unharmed after hefty ransom payments.

The militants have also blown up pipelines and offshore oil platforms.

Horrors of religious violence found in Nigeria

Jon Gambrell

AP (22.01.2010) / HRWF (23.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net -Muslim volunteers discovered Friday that sectarian violence in central Nigeria this week extended beyond the long-restive city of Jos and into the burned shell of what used to be a small village near it.

Both Christians and Muslims died during the violence that began Sunday in the central Nigerian city once known as a prime tourist destination in West Africa. The nonprofit group Human Rights Watch puts the death toll among both religions at more than 200. More than 5,000 people have been displaced.

However, as Muslim volunteers arrived in the village of Kurujantar - about 18 miles (30 kilometers) south of Jos - they found corpses shoved three-at-a-time into sewer pits, pushed into communal wells and scattered in bushes. One volunteer held up the charred body of an infant that lay inside a cardboard box.

Nearly all the mud-walled homes in the one-time mining town suffered fire damage or had been destroyed. The central mosque, where residents say both the young and old sought refuge during an attack Tuesday, sat burned, ashes spread across the floor where the faithful once prayed.

Community leader Wardhead Umaru Baza, 58, said Friday that more than 300 were dead from the violence, which lasted seven hours. He said he hid in a hole as rioters armed with new and locally made firearms shot residents in the mostly Muslim village.

His causality figure could not be independently verified. Volunteers there said they had collected the bodies of about 100 people since the attack, though more likely remained.

Sectarian violence in this central region of Nigeria has left thousands dead over the past decade. The latest outbreak came despite the Nigerian government's efforts to quell religious extremism in the West African country.

Jos is located in Nigeria's "middle belt," where dozens of ethnic groups mingle in a band of fertile and hotly contested land separating the Muslim north from the predominantly Christian south.

There are conflicting accounts about what unleashed the recent bloodshed. According to the state police commissioner, skirmishes began after Muslim youths set a Christian church ablaze, but Muslim leaders denied that. Muslims say it began with an argument over the rebuilding of a Muslim home in a predominantly Christian neighborhood that had been destroyed in November 2008.

Baza said the police did not heed the community's call for help in the wake of violence in Jos, leaving the townspeople at risk.

Baza said he didn't know where his wife was. "Maybe she's dead," he said, wiping a single tear.

Even in Jos, volunteers discovered the charred body of one victim Friday in the Anglo Jos neighborhood. Resident Adamu Bala, 22, said rioters rampaged through the Muslim neighborhood Monday after police warned the residents to flee. Bala escaped, but attackers killed his 32-year-old brother and set his body on fire. Burning of corpses is considered desecration in Islam.

On Friday, graffiti written in burned charcoal left after the attack praised Jesus Christ as "the mighty man in battle" and declared the neighborhood "New Jerusalem." However, it couldn't be determined who wrote the slogans - or when.

During Friday prayers, Jos central mosque Imam Balarabe Daud told followers that the Quran forbade the killing of innocent people and warned "hell fire" awaited those who led the violence that has engulfed the city. He called on those praying to cooperate with the Army soldiers now manning makeshift road blocks throughout the city.

Maj. Gen. Saleh Maina, who is overseeing the security operation in Jos, warned that anyone violating the city's dusk-to-dawn curfew would be harshly dealt with. Maina also asked anyone with weapons to turn them over to authorities - something that could be unlikely in a city where gunshots still echo during the night.

As the sun began to set Friday in Kurujantar, volunteers carried bodies with a cheetah-print blanket to a large grave dug in front of a destroyed home. Abdullahi Wase, 52, watched as his wife's body tumbled into the hole. Two of his sons, ages 19 and 5, remain missing.

"I cannot even shed tears anymore," Wase said.

But as volunteers shoveled the clay-red dirt in the grave, he turned away and wept.

Timeline: Ethnic and religious unrest in Nigeria

Reuters (20.01.2010) / HRWF (25.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Following is a timeline of religious and ethnic violence in Nigeria:

2000 - Thousands killed in northern Nigeria as non-Muslims opposed to the introduction of Islamic sharia law fight Muslims who demand its implementation in the northern state of Kaduna.

Sept. 2001 - Christian-Muslim violence flares after Muslim prayers in Jos, with churches and mosques set on fire. At least 1,000 people are killed, according to a Sept. 2002 report by a panel set up by Plateau state government.

Nov. 2002 - Nigeria abandons the Miss World contest in Abuja. The decision follows the death of at least 216 people in rioting in the northern city of Kaduna after a newspaper article suggests the Prophet Mohammad would probably have married one of the Miss World beauty queens if he were alive today. May 2004 - Hundreds of people, mostly Muslim Fulanis, are killed by Christian Tarok militia in the central Nigerian town of Yelwa. Survivors say they buried 630 corpses. Police say hundreds were killed.

-- Muslim and Christian militants fight street battles later the same month in the northern city of Kano. Christian community leaders say 500-600 people, mostly Christians, were killed in the two days of rioting by Muslims.

Feb. 2006 - At least 157 people die in a week of rioting by Muslim and Christian mobs. The violence begins in the northeastern city of Maiduguri when a Muslim protest against Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad runs out of control. Revenge attacks follow in the south.

Nov. 2008 - Clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs triggered by a disputed local government election kill at least 700 people in the central city of Jos, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch.

Feb. 2009 - The governor of Bauchi state imposes a night curfew on Bauchi city on Feb. 22, a day after clashes in which at least 11 people die, 28 are seriously wounded and several houses, churches and mosques are burnt down.

July 2009 - Boko Haram, an organisation which opposes Western education and demands the adoption of sharia in all of Nigeria, stages attacks in the northeastern city of Bauchi on July 26 after the arrest of some of its members. More than 50 people are killed and over 100 arrested, prompting the Bauchi state governor to impose a night curfew on the state capital.

-- Boko Haram, which means "Western education is sinful", threatens further attacks on security forces.

-- Police in Maiduguri, home of Boko Haram's leader Mohammed Yusuf, say security forces killed 90 sect members on July 27. In neighbouring Yobe state, police recover the bodies of 33 sect members after a gun battle near the town of Potiskum on July 29.

-- Yusuf is shot dead while in police detention in Maiduguri on July 30.

-- Red Cross and defence officials say more than 700 people were killed during the five-day Boko Haram uprising.

Dec. 2009 - At least 40 people are killed in clashes between security forces and members of an Islamic sect armed with machetes in the northern city of Bauchi.

Jan. 2010 - At least 216 people die in two days of clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs in Jos. Police impose a 24-hour curfew, enforced by hundreds of soldiers and police. The violence stemmed from an argument between Muslim and Christian neighbours over rebuilding homes destroyed in the 2008 clashes.

Nearly 200' die in fresh Nigeria religious clashes

Bangkok Post (19.01.2010) / HRWF (20.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Nearly 200 people have been killed in fresh religious clashes between Christians and Muslims in the Nigerian city of Jos, a senior Muslim cleric and paramedic said.

State authorities placed the city under a 24-hour curfew and terrified residents reported hearing gunshots and seeing smoke billowing from parts of the city, the capital of Plateau State in central Nigeria.

The bodies of the most of the dead were being brought in to the city's central mosque, according to its head Balarabe Dawud.

"We received 156 dead bodies this morning and another 36 this afternoon, in total we have 192 dead bodies," Dawud said.

He said at least 800 people had been wounded in the clashes, 90 of whom had been evacuated to military hospitals with serious injuries.

Fighting had spread to Bukuru town on the outskirts of Jos by late afternoon, killing at least three people, paramedic Maryam Mohammed said at a clinic there.

"So far we have three dead and 39 injured," he said.

Dawud, the imam, said the Jos central mosque was attending to those with minor injuries, but had run out of medical supplies.

"Even neighbourhood private clinics are full with the injured. Normally these are the places we would have gone to for supplies, but they are also in need of them," he said.

An employee of the mosque, Mohammed Shittu, told AFP earlier that "the mosque is full with the injured and the dead," adding that 156 bodies had been taken to the mosque on Tuesday morning.

Authorities said a curfew put in place at the weekend had been extended.

"The government has placed a 24-hour curfew on Jos and Bukuru following the resumption of violence in parts of the city," the state's information commissioner Gregory Yenlong told AFP.

"All residents are hereby directed to stay indoors as security agents work towards restoring peace," said Yenlong.

All flights to the city were suspended Tuesday, airport and airline sources said.

David Maiyaki, a Christian resident of Dutse Uku area of Jos where the latest fighting erupted overnight, said the curfew did not yet seem to have taken effect and "fighting is continuing unabated".

"We woke up to new fighting this morning. As I am talking to you we are indoors, but there is burning and gunshots all around us," David Maiyaki told AFP by phone.

Ibrahim Mudi, a resident of Sabon Fegi suburb, said: "From here I can hear gunshots and see burning buildings from a neighbourhood in the northern part of the city."

"It seems that Jos north is completely on fire," added Mudi, who spoke by phone from his veranda.

Mohammed Ahmad from the Unguwarrogo area said the city "is enveloped in smoke and gunshots have filled the air".

"It's quite terrifying. We are indoors but we don't feel safe. It's like any moment something is going to happen to us," said Ahmad.

Sunday's fighting had been confined to the predominantly Christian Nassarawa Gwon area but has since spread to other parts of the city, the army said.

"It is not concentrated, it is not limited to one area, it is scattered," army spokesman Colonel Galadima Shekari told AFP.

Fighting first erupted when Christian youths protested the building of a mosque in a Christian-majority area of Nigeria's 10th-largest city. Houses and vehicles were set ablaze.

Sunday's clashes killed at least 26 people, according to Muslim leaders. The Red Cross said more than 100 people were seriously injured in that fighting and that it was struggling to cope with around 3,000 displaced people.

State authorities said on Monday that calm had returned and urged people to go about their daily activities as normal after hundreds of troops and police had been drafted in to impose order and a 12-hour dusk-to-dawn curfew.

The curfew was extended following the latest clashes.

Jos, situated between the Muslim-dominated north and the Christian south, has in recent years been a hotbed of religious violence in Nigeria, whose 150 million people are divided almost equally between followers of the two faiths.

In November 2008, hundreds of people were killed in two days of fighting in the city triggered by a rumour that the mainly Muslim All Nigerian Peoples Party had lost a local election to the Christian dominated People's Democratic Party.

At least 800 people were killed in Borno State last July when security forces put down an insurrection by a Muslim fundamentalist sect. In December, around 70 were killed in clashes between security forces and members of another radical sect in Bauchi State.

Torching of Nigerian church sets off deadly riot

Ahmed Saka

AP (18.01.2010) / HRWF (20.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Angry Muslim youths set a church filled with worshippers ablaze in northern Nigeria, starting a riot that killed at least 27 people and wounded more than 300 others in the latest religious violence in the region, officials said Monday.

About 5,000 people lost their homes as rioters also burned mosques and homes in Jos, a city that saw more than 300 residents killed during a similar uprising in 2008, said local Red Cross official Auwal Muhammad Madobi. He said he had no information about deaths. Police officials declined to offer a count of the dead.

Sani Mudi, a spokesman for the local imam, said 22 people died Sunday after rioters set fire to a Catholic church, starting a daylong wave of violence between Christians and Muslims. Five others died Monday from their wounds, and police and soldiers set up numerous road blocks throughout Jos.

An Associated Press reporter saw the bodies of 10 dead youths, marked with bullet holes and machete wounds, at a local hospital on Monday. On Sunday, witnesses told reporters they saw 10 bodies at a mosque in the city. It was unclear if the bodies in the hospital were the same ones seen in the mosque.

The rioting began Sunday, when the youths attacked a church, said Gregory Yenlong, a state government spokesman. Yenlong said he didn't know why the young men set the blaze.

"That's what's being investigated," he said.

Police arrested 35 people who they suspect took part in the rioting, Yenlong said. He said at least five of the men arrested were wearing fake Nigerian military uniforms. He also said a dusk-to-dawn curfew would remain in place on Jos for the coming days.

Musa Pam, secretary of a local Christian elders forum, issued a statement Monday claiming the Muslim youths picked Sunday to launch their attack because they knew Christians would be worshipping at church. He asked the police to bring the killers to justice, because Christians were being attacked without cause.

Kabiru Mohammed, a Muslim resident who lost his home in the 2008 violence, told reporters Monday that after he recently started to rebuild his house, local Christian youths surrounded it and demanded that he stop construction.

"They said the area now belongs to them," Mohammed said.

The youths attacked, killing two laborers working on the home, Mohammed said.

Ahmed Garba, a Muslim lawyer, said he escaped being lynched by a group of Christian youths armed with bows and arrows, knives, stones and locally made firearms. He watched as they attacked and stabbed three people.

Traffic in the northern Nigerian city remained light on Monday, as the few cars traveling met multiple roadblocks and close searches by police and soldiers. Local police spokesman Mohammed Lerama said the site of the rioting remained sealed off, but that calm had returned to Jos.

"There's an absolute peace," Lerama said.

Jos sits in the heart of northern Nigeria, home to the nation's Muslim population. Religious violence, largely based on local disputes rather than global conflicts, has struck Jos in the past. Rioting in September 2001 killed more than 1,000 people and Muslim-Christian battles killed up to 700 people in 2004.

11 children await trial over sect violence in Nigeria

AFP (12.01.2010) / HRWF (13.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Eleven children aged between five and 13 were being held at a juvenile jail in northern Nigeria awaiting trial following sectarian clashes that left 70 people dead last month, police have said.

"As far as we are concerned they are suspects and they will be arraigned before court of law when the on-going judicial strike ends," Bauchi police commissioner Atiku Kafur told AFP in a telephone interview.

He did not give details of the charges they are facing.

The Red Cross said the children were part of 48 displaced when their homes were destroyed during the year-end violence.

Clashes erupted in Bauchi between suspected members of a radical Islamist sect known as Kala-Kato and security forces at the end of December.

At least 70 people were killed, many of them children and minors.

Houses, cars and motorcycles were burnt during the clashes.
