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Christian woman killed in Nigeria's Kaduna State

Suspected Muslim gunmen shoot her, her husband and his cousin

Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (20.01.12) / HRWF (19.01.12) – A Muslim villager in Kaduna state allegedly helped Fulani herdsmen and other Muslims from nearby Kafanchan to ambush a Christian settlement, resulting in the death of one woman and gunshot wounds to two other Christians on Dec. 10, area sources said.

Musa Blak, 60, told Compass how gunmen lurking behind trees outside his home killed his wife, Kunam Musa Blak, and wounded him and his cousin, 48-year-old Monday Blai Yayok, after a schoolteacher in Kukum Gida village allegedly helped Muslims survey the site. Kunam Musa Blak was 50.

In the Jankassa ward of Kukum Gida village, a Christian settlement of 425 people who all attend the local Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Musa Blak and his family were asleep when they were awakened by the sound of barking dogs at 11:45 p.m., he said.

"I decided to go outside and find out what was happening," Blak said. "While outside, I noticed a dark figure standing behind some cactus trees near my house. I neither moved nor said anything, but kept watching to see what this figure would do."

Hidden behind the trees were Muslim gunmen who had taken positions around the village with the intent of ambushing villagers, he said.

"A few minutes afterwards, the figure moved away quietly, and at this point my wife too came out of the room and met me outside, asking whether I had found anything," he said. "I then told her about the figure I saw that moved away."

As he spoke to her, suddenly he heard a gunshot and saw his wife go down.

"I heard the sound of a gunshot, and suddenly I heard my wife crying as she fell to the ground. I tried reaching to hold her when I too was hit by a bullet," Blak said. "I still struggled by crawling to the place my wife was lying on the ground and held her in my arms even as I was bleeding."

Awakened villagers trooped out of their houses, he said, and as his cousin, Yayok, stepped out of Blak's house, he also was shot.

With other villagers streaming out and soldiers stationed at nearby Kagoro, the assailants must have sensed that it would be difficult to overrun the village and withdrew, he said; by the time military personnel received information about the invasion and rushed over, the gunmen had left.

The soldiers transported him, his cousin and his wife's body to Kafanchan General Hospital, and then Blak and Yayok were referred to Bingham University Teaching Hospital in Jos; there Musa had his bullet wounds treated, and Yayok underwent surgery on Dec. 12.

"We believe that Muslim Fulani herdsmen who once lived near our village, with the support of Muslims from Kafanchan, were the ones who attacked us," Blak said.

Jonah Bayina, the 43-year-old head of the village ward, identified the Muslim schoolteacher suspected of helping to lead the gunmen to the site in Kaduna state, which has been wracked by several attacks on Christians the past few months.

"Isa Damu, a Fulani Muslim who teaches in one public school here, is the one who led his fellow Muslims to attack us," Bayina told Compass. "On Tuesday, Dec. 6, he brought some Muslims to the village, and they stayed with him until they left on Friday, Dec. 9, and then they launched the attack on us the following day. We believe he brought the Muslims to enable them to survey our village before attacking us."

Damu disappeared on the night of the attack, and he has not been seen since, he said.

"His head teacher phoned him, and they spoke, but Damu refused to disclose where he was, nor gave any reasons for absconding from his teaching post," Bayina said.

A member of ECWA church in Kukum Gida, Bayina said this was the first attack on the Christian settlement, which lies at the bottom of a cliff face rising 50 meters, less than two kilometers from the Kagoro ECWA Theological Seminary.

"Even though this is the first attack on our community, we are now living in fear and uncertainty as regards our safety," he said. "The incident has now forced us to keep watch over the village at night, as even a day after the attack, that is, on the night of Sunday, Dec. 11, the attackers returned again to attack us, but through resilience and

courage and with the help of soldiers who rushed in from Kagoro, we were able to repel the Muslim attackers."

Blak said that in spite of the murder of his wife, he has been praying for the assailants.

"I have been praying that these Muslims who attack us come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, too," he said. "I have forgiven them, because I know they do not know what they are doing."

He urged Christians to pray for those persecuting them.

"Jesus Christ also did the same while on the cross," he said.

Christmas carnage in Nigeria: 5 churches bombed

CNN (26.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) - A string of bombs struck churches in five Nigerian cities Sunday, leaving dozens dead and wounded on the holiday, authorities and witnesses said.

The blasts mark the second holiday season that bombs have hit Christian houses of worship in the west African nation. In a statement issued late Sunday, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan called the bombings "a dastardly act that must attract the rebuke of all peace-loving Nigerians."

"These acts of violence against innocent citizens are an unwarranted affront on our collective safety and freedom," Jonathan said. "Nigerians must stand as one to condemn them."

Bombs targeted churches across the country, hitting the cities of Madalla, Jos, Kano, and Damaturu and Gadaka, said journalist Hassan John, who witnessed the carnage in Jos. The death toll in Madalla alone was 18, including two people reported dead overnight at a nearby hospital, Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency spokesman Yushau Shuaib told CNN.

John said witnesses in Madalla reported a higher death toll, with more than 30 killed. Some victims died after being taken to a hospital, he said.

In Damaturu, a northern town in Yobe state, a police station and a state security building were also bombed, an aid worker said. The worker asked not to be named for security reasons.

Nwakpa Okorie, a spokesman for the Nigerian Red Cross, said the some of the wounded were taken to the capital Abuja for treatment.

"The situation is under control now. The security agents have secured the streets close to the bombed areas ... in Madalla, Jos and Dematuru," he said.

Jonathan said his government "will not relent in its determination to bring to justice all the perpetrators of today's acts of violence and all others before now." And in Washington, the White House said U.S. officials would help Nigeria pursue those behind "what initially appear to be terrorist acts."

"We condemn this senseless violence and tragic loss of life on Christmas Day," White House spokesman Jay Carney said in a written statement. "We offer our sincere condolences to the Nigerian people and especially those who lost family and loved ones."

The first explosion Sunday struck near a Roman Catholic church in Madalla, west of Abuja, Nigeria's capital, the National Emergency Management Agency said. Church officials were trying to get a picture of what happened in the city.

"Lives have been lost but we do not have the details," said the Rev. Michael Ekpenyong.

"The area has been cordoned off. I tried to call the priest, but I couldn't get through."

Ekpenyong, the secretary general of the country's Catholic Secretariat, said the church that was bombed was "not a big church, but lots of people attend." Photos from the scene showed burned-out cars and at least three bodies on the ground, one covered with a blanket, at the rural church.

Usman Abdallah Baba, who witnessed the bombing, said there were at least 15 or 16 casualties and that authorities were still counting the toll.

Baba said local people were already blaming the violent extremist Muslim Boko Haram sect, which has targeted Christians as well as Muslims its members consider insufficiently Islamic.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the acts "in the strongest terms," his office said in a statement Sunday.

He expressed his condolences to the Nigerian people and reiterated a call "for an end to all acts of sectarian violence in the country."

In 2010, five churches in Jos were attacked while residents were celebrating Christmas Eve. The blasts killed dozens in Jos, which lies on a faith-based fault line between the Muslim-dominated north and the mainly Christian south.

On Sunday, two blasts targeted the Mountain of Fire Ministries church in Jos, northeast of the capital, said John. No one was killed in that bombing, which John called a "miracle" -- but a police officer who got into a gun battle with the attackers died of his wounds later, John said, citing officials.

The second church, in Jos, was hit by two explosions when young men threw bombs, John said. Police responded quickly and exchanged gunfire with the attackers, who wounded at least one of the police officers, he said.

The injured officer was rushed to the Jos University teaching hospital for medical attention, but died of his wounds, John said. The attackers fled into the crowd and disappeared after the attack, John said.

Police arrested four people and recovered four unexploded devices, Nigerian state television reported.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and has the world's sixth-largest Christian population -- about 80.5 million people as of 2010, according to a report published this month by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life in Washington. That makes the country just over 50% Christian, according to the Pew figures.

Dozens killed in fighting in Nigeria

The latest attacks follow two days of clashes between militants and security forces in northern Nigeria. Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika, the Nigerian army chief of staff, said the clashes left three soldiers dead and several more wounded.

The fighting began Thursday between Boko Haram militants and the military in the Yobe state town of Damaturu, Ihejirika said.

"There was a major encounter with the Boko Haram in Damaturu," Ihejirika said Friday. "We lost three of our soldiers, seven were wounded. But we killed over 50 of their members."

Boko Haram translates from the local Hausa as "Western education is outlawed." The group has morphed into an insurgency responsible for dozens of attacks in Nigeria in the last two years.

Boko Haram's targets include police outposts and churches as well as places associated with "Western influence."

Nigeria: Estimated 40 dead in Christmas Day attacks in five states

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (26.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) - Over 40 people are thought to have died in a series of Christmas Day bomb and gun attacks that targeted churches and members of the security services in five states in northern and central

Nigeria. The Islamist militia Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for the attacks, which occurred in Niger, Plateau, Yobe, Adamawa and Borno States.

The majority of fatalities occurred at St Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, Niger State, where bombers in a vehicle hurled explosives at the congregation at the end of mass. Sources told Christian Solidarity Worldwide-Nigeria (CSW-N) that the priest had asked parishioners to stay a little longer for Christmas souvenirs. Those who did not remain for the ceremony were caught up in the blast.

At least 35 people died in the Madalla bombing, with scores more suffering various degrees of injury, some potentially fatal. CSW-N was informed that in several cases the blast claimed entire families, some of whom were burnt beyond recognition in their cars. In the case of one family, the sole survivor was a thirteen year-old girl called Chidinma, who had not attended church that day.

The next explosions targeted a Mountain of Fire Ministries church in Murtala Mohammad Way in the Plateau state capital, Jos. The bombers were on foot because the state government had temporarily banned the use of unregistered motorcycles for this very reason. The first device destroyed a large building outside the church. However, a police patrol was passing by just as the bombers threw the second, which hit a wall and destroyed a few cars. Four culprits, reportedly Muslims from the Gangare area, were apprehended following a fire fight in which a policeman was injured and later died. There were no other casualties, and two more locally made explosives were allegedly recovered nearby and disarmed.

Multiple explosions were reported next from Damaturu, capital of Yobe State, where fighting between security forces and Boko Haram had claimed over 60 lives earlier in the week. Most significantly, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb outside the offices of the State Security Service (SSS), killing three SSS men. In a subsequent attack on a church in Gadaka, a town approximately 155 km west of Damaturu, gunmen set ablaze five cars as worshippers fled, but no lives were reported lost.

A bomb exploded at a hotel in Mubi in Adamawa State injuring one person, but other bombs planted around three churches were reportedly disarmed. In the Wasin Umurari area of Maiduguri, capital of Borno State, six people died in an attack launched by suspected Boko Haram gunmen.

Following the attacks, many Christians lamented the fact that their security is no longer guaranteed in northern and central Nigeria. Some are even beginning to avoid church gatherings for fear of being bombed.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "The Christmas Day bombings were appalling and cowardly attacks on innocent families who were merely expressing their faith on one of the most significant dates in the Christian calendar. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of the victims, and with Christians throughout the region who understandably feel increasingly vulnerable. Clearly, while security is tight in Abuja, Madalla and other satellite towns to the capital have become alternative soft targets and require urgent additional protection. The continuing insecurity in Yobe and Borno States is also deeply worrying, as are the reported attacks in Adamawa. It is vital that federal and state authorities spare no effort in pursuing, capturing and prosecuting funders and perpetrators of this violence, no matter how highly placed they may be. The bombings are a serious threat to freedom of religion in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic state where co-existence is vital. For the sake of national unity, those behind them must not be allowed to prevail."

Clashes between sect, police kill 61 in Nigeria

Jon Gambrell

The Associated Press (24.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) - Fighting between a radical Muslim sect and paramilitary forces in Nigeria has killed at least 61 people over several days of violence in the nation's northeast that has left churches bombed and people hiding in fear, authorities said.

In hard-hit Yobe state, where at least 50 people died, the government on Saturday ordered a dusk-till-dawn curfew following attacks by the sect known as Boko Haram. In Maiduguri, the capital of neighboring Borno state, bombs reduced at least three churches to rubble and raised fears of further attacks by a group that claimed Christmas Eve bombings last year that killed dozens.

The fighting began Thursday in the two states, with gunfire and explosions heard into the night and the following day in an arid region that borders Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Damaturu, the capital of Yobe state, and the town of Potiskum bore the brunt of the violence.

In Damaturu, residents fled their homes near the city's central mosque ahead of a combined attack by soldiers and the federal police's feared Mobile Police, known as "kill-and-go" for their propensity for violence. The paramilitary forces raided the area in armored personnel carriers and tanks, with heavy gunfire marking their arrival.

"We were able to kill 12 of the Boko Haram armed sect and bombers," local police commissioner Lawan Tanko said. The police commissioner said officers also recovered Kalashnikov rifles, ammunition and explosives.

In Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, a mortuary official who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter told The Associated Press at least 11 bodies had been brought in from the violence. Authorities blamed Boko Haram for firebombing at least three churches around the capital, attacks that killed one pastor and his young child.

This is just the latest in a series of bombings over the last year by Boko Haram. The group, whose name means "Western education is sacrilege" in the local Hausa language, wants to implement strict Shariah law across a nation of more than 160 million people that is home to both Christians and Muslims.

Boko Haram claimed responsibility for a Nov. 4 attack on Damaturu, Yobe state's capital, that killed more than 100 people. The group also claimed the Aug. 24 suicide car bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Nigeria's capital that killed 24 people and wounded 116 others.

While initially targeting enemies via hit-and-run assassinations from the back of motorbikes, violence by Boko Haram now has a new sophistication and apparent planning that includes high-profile attacks with greater casualties. The sect is responsible for at least 465 killings in Nigeria this year alone, according to an AP count.

Boko Haram has splintered into three factions, with one wing increasingly willing to kill as it maintains contact with terror groups in North Africa and Somalia, diplomats and security sources say. That, as well as its increasingly violent attacks, have some worried the group will carry out further attacks around Christmas and New Year's.

Last year, a series of Christmas Eve bombings in the central Nigerian city of Jos claimed by Boko Haram killed at least 32 people and wounded at least 74 others.

With those attacks in mind, the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria's capital of Abuja issued a warning Friday to citizens to be "particularly vigilant" around churches, large crowds and areas where foreigners congregate.

Analysts say the government's response remains strained as President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the country's south, remains worried about alienating the country's predominantly Muslim north with heavy-handed tactics. In 2009, a military and police crackdown following rioting by Boko Haram members in and around Maiduguri left 700 people dead.

Yet since Thursday, authorities have been using paramilitary police and soldiers more freely. Tanko, the Yobe state police commissioner, said joint patrols by the military and police would continue.

"When you are fighting people you don't know, you cannot say that's the end of the exercise," Tanko said. "We are trying to ensure that will be the end, but we are monitoring what is going on. But we know we cannot specifically say that will be the end."

Five Christians slain in another assault in Kaduna, Nigeria

Two others killed in Muslim attack on another village last month

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (23.12.11) / HRWF (18.1.12) – Local Islamists and Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked a Christian community in Kaduna state on Monday (Dec. 19), killing five people and wounding six, area sources said, just nine days after a deadly attack on a Christian community in Kukum Gida in the same local government area.

The Muslim assailants, brandishing firearms and machetes, attacked Christians in Ungwan Rami village of Kaura Local Government Area at 10 p.m. in a manner consistent with other religiously motivated assaults in the state, which saw Christians killed last month as well, the sources said.

Ungwan Rami resident Kumai Yanet told Compass that local Muslims and some Muslim Fulani herdsmen first attacked Christians stationed to keep watch over the village.

"These Muslims attacked our community members who had assembled in the house of my elder brother, Zakka Yanet," Yanet said. "A few minutes later, they attacked my house, which is near my brother's house. None in my house was hit by a bullet, but as you can see, there are bullet holes all over my house."

Ungwan Rami, with about 800 residents who are all Christians, has four church denominations: Roman Catholic, Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and Cherubim and Seraphim. The five Christians killed were members of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, as are those who were injured. The wounded, including a 3-year-old girl cut with a machete, were being treated at the Bingham University Teaching Hospital in Jos, Plateau state.

The five Christians killed were Matthew Yusuf, 28; Joseph John, 30; Innocent Abba, 33; Mathias John, 35; and Didam Zakka, 19. Those injured were Linda Emmanuel, 3; Emmanuel Zakka, 28; Gabriel Zakka, 20; Deborah Emmanuel, 19; Dominic Daniel, 25; and Gideon Anthony, 30.

Catholic priests from the archdiocese of Kaduna held funeral service for those killed on Wednesday (Dec. 21) in Ungwan Rami.

The Rev. Francis Dauda Nni told those gathered not to despair in the face of the onslaught, as God predestined them to shed blood to help build the Kingdom of Christ, and their sacrifice was not in vain.

"The death of these five is a sacrifice and a blessing to us," he said. "Know this, the death of a martyr is a blessing to God's people."

He urged Christians in the community never to contemplate vengeance for the attack.

"No one amongst you should think of avenging the attack on you, because when we avenge there would be no end to the crisis in this country," Nni said. "Therefore, depend on God, for He is the only one who can protect you and avenge for you."

He said the Nigerian government is neglecting protection for Christians in such remote areas.

"There is the need for me to call the attention of the Nigerian government to the fact that security is being provided in cities and towns to ward off attacks, but the rural areas and villages are being left unprotected," he said. "The government should ensure that security agencies are well equipped to patrol the villages too, so that the killing of innocent Christian villagers would end."

The Rev. Richard Angolia, parish priest of St. Joseph's, expressed sadness that within a span of two weeks, two attacks have been carried out against two Christian communities in the area, resulting in six deaths and eight injured Christians; on Dec. 10, a Muslim villager in Kukum Gida allegedly helped Muslim Fulani herdsmen attack the village, killing 50-year-old Kunam Musa Blak (see www.compassdirect.org, "Christian Woman Killed in Nigeria's Kaduna State," Dec. 20).

Florence Aya, chairperson of the Interim Management Committee of Kaura Local Government Council, told Compass that those attacked in Ungwan Rami included "a pregnant woman and a 3-year-old girl. The girl was cut with a machete."

Aya said those killed had gathered to patrol and keep watch over their village as a result of attacks on Christian communities in the area.

"They were not aware that already the attackers had hidden themselves in bushes around the village," she said.

During the funeral service, Aya said the attack was unprovoked, with the victims having committed no crimes except being Christian.

"I urge you all, my brethren, to have faith in Christ Jesus," she said. "God will avenge these killings for us. Security is in the hands of God, so, if we depend on him, He will protect us."

Kaduna Under Siege

The state has suffered a rash of attacks in recent months. On Nov. 10, Muslim Fulani herdsmen assaulted another Christian village, Apiokashi, in the Jema'a Local Government Area, killing village leader Bulus Adamu, 40, and his wife, Ladi Bulus.

Apiokashi village has about 300 Christians, all of them members of either the local ECWA church or the Catholic church.

Obadiah Adamu, 16, oldest of the eight children the slain couple leaves behind, told Compass that the Muslims sneaked into the village at night. His sister, Asabe Bulus, said that the family was asleep when the Muslim Fulani herdsmen arrived.

"They stoned the windows of our rooms," she said. "Our dad went out to find out who was stoning the windows, and then he was shot. The sound of the gunshots forced our

mother to run out of her room to find out what was going on, only for her too to be killed.”

A young Christian man in the village, Samson Joshua, sustained injuries when he was shot by the attackers, source said.

Ayuba Simon, 42, acting village head, told Compass that the Muslim Fulani herdsmen again invaded the village on Dec. 15, but villagers keeping watch repelled them.

“We know these Muslims who have been attacking us – they also do so in company of Fulani herdsmen, and they currently reside at Dangoma village, a Muslim settlement about seven kilometers south of our village,” Simon said. “Security agencies know this, but they have not done anything to arrest them.”

Asabe Bulus said the Nigerian government must find ways to stem the assaults.

“As Christians, we have been living peacefully with these Muslims, but we do not understand why they should now attack us,” she said.

Explosions

With these attacks on Christian communities, Christians in Kaduna are increasingly restless as dozens have been killed and hundreds displaced in recent months.

After an explosion in Kaduna city on Nov. 7, Chukwuma Nwaejiaka, a 32-year-old Christian and member of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, said he thought the world had come to an end.

The businessman stood and watched as his warehouse went up in flames after it was bombed alongside shops owned by his fellow Christians, he said.

“I saw people being rescued out of the destroyed buildings,” he said. “Some of them had burns all over their bodies. There were dead bodies that littered the place, and everywhere was burning.”

A young Christian man identified only as Onyeka had plans to get married a week before he died in the blast, Nwaejiaka said.

Nine people lay dead when rescue workers ended their rescue operations – members of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Living Faith Church congregations. At press time the death toll from the blast had risen to 16 persons, according to the National Emergency Management Agency.

“No one sold gas in this building complex, so the claim by the police that the explosion was caused by gas is false,” Nwaejiaka said. “I think the police are making this claim just to calm frayed nerves over the unending bombings going on in the country that have left the police helpless.”

Peter Ozoemena, a Christian with a shop fewer than 50 meters from the bombed shops, said the nine shops with 15 apartments attached to them were affected.

“The shops were bombed when two men came on a motorbike and parked in front of the shops,” he said. “One of the men whom we believe was a Muslim extremist, probably a member of Boko Haram, went to speak to one of three Christian teenagers. A few minutes later, the Muslim suddenly bolted, and then a loud explosion occurred. One of these two Muslims had the bomb concealed in a carton. It exploded and killed the bearer of the carton, while the second was injured.”

In the midst of the commotion that followed, colleagues of the injured Muslim whisked him away, he said.

Ozoemena said his wife, Peace Ozoemena, was walking towards the building at the time of the explosion.

"She was thrown away by the impact of the bomb," he said. "We were all shaken by the attack. Fire was burning all over those buildings, and the entire place was pulled down."

He was bitter that police would misinform the public about the cause of the explosion.

"We are not happy about the lies the police commissioner has been telling the people," he said. "How can they say that the explosion was caused by gas when no traders sell gas in these shops?"

Ismail Muhammad, 30, a Muslim phone card seller who owns a shop near the bombed Christian shops, told Compass that he saw eight bodies of Christians who were killed.

"A Christian woman who is a street sweeper was injured in the attack," he added. "She had a baby strapped on her back, so both were critically injured and were taken to Barau Dikko Specialist Hospital here in Kaduna."

A female Muslim student lived in one of the homes behind the shops, he said.

"Her name is Khadijat, she is a student of the Kaduna Polytechnic, she was trapped in the house and she died too," Muhammad said, adding that a teenage Muslim boy named Abdulateef also died and a Muslim named Suleiman was injured. He also refuted police claims that the explosion was due to ignited gas canisters.

"How can police make such claims when there was no gas sold here?" he said. "In fact, what I saw are small refill-canisters of car air-conditioner. These canisters cannot cause this kind of destruction even if they explode."

The bombing of these Christian-owned shops came on the heels of similar bombings of businesses and church buildings in Yobe state.

Leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) have called on the Nigerian government to confront the growing terrorism. CAN President Ayo Oritsejafor urged police in Nigeria to properly investigate the explosion instead of spreading false information to the public.

CAN also urged Nigerian security agencies to put aside religious bias in order to end the destabilization of the country.

Three Christians killed in attacks in Nigeria's Kaduna State

Armed Muslim gang raids church, neighboring village; 8-year-old among 13 injured

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (08.11.11) / HRWF (14.11.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – It was a few minutes before 10 at night when the staccato sound of gunfire interrupted the serene worship of St. Joseph's Catholic Church near Zonkwa, Kaduna state. When the chaos ended, two women lay dead and 12 people were wounded.

The attack by a Muslim extremist gang in Tabak 1 village on Thursday (Nov. 3) shattered the peace long known to Christians there, area sources said. The following night at about the same time, the gang raided another Christian community near Zonkwa, Kurmin-Bi, killing one Christian and injuring another.

While the Islamic extremist Boko Haram was responsible for several attacks that killed at least 150 people in Borno and Yobe states in Nigeria's northeast over the weekend, Christians in Tabak 1 village in northern Nigeria's centrally located Kaduna state said the church attack appeared to come from a Muslim gang not affiliated with the terrorist group.

The two women killed were Justina Zugwai Isaac, 28, and Hassana Luka, 39. A Roman Catholic seminary student who was leading worship at the time, 32-year-old Emmanuel Mallam, said it was a miracle that only the two women died in the attack.

Unaware that the attackers were hidden in the bushes around the church building, the two women were outside the building when they were shot, Mallam said. He had asked parishioner Julius Jacob, 38, to make closing remarks when the shooting began.

"As these Muslims began shooting, they shot Mrs. Justina Isaac, a mother of three, who had all the while been hanging around by the window outside the church listening to my teachings in the church," he said. "And when she was felled by the bullets, the cry of her baby attracted another woman, Mrs. Hassana Luka, who came out of her house close to the church to find out what the problem was, only to be killed too."

Before the attack, Mallam had asked all women and children in the church to return to their homes for safety reasons, but Zugwai Isaac had remained near the window listening to the teaching, he said.

"I asked the women and children to leave because it was getting late, and we had already had two hours of teaching on this very important topic," he said. "So, the women and children left the church, and I and about 50 men stayed behind to round up our discussion on the topic."

Mallam said he was leading a talk about the significance of the Eucharist in the church when the Muslim assailants, "who must have laid ambush around the church for a while," opened fire into the church building

"I was dazed and confused, as I have never experienced anything like this before," he said. "All over I could see bullets flying around us with fire. I ducked and ran blindly, not knowing where I was running to, until I found a window and jumped out of the church. That was how I escaped being killed."

Mallam said he fled as the firing continued, running to nearby Aduwan village to alert the community about the attack in his community.

"While there, I phoned a fellow seminarian, Kelvin Dominic, whose older brother is military personnel and was in the village at the time," he said. "Dominic in turn informed his soldier brother about the attack, and he too reported the incident to his military colleagues manning the numerous road-blocks in the area."

Mallam said the soldiers evacuated both the injured and the dead to the St. Louis Catholic Hospital in Zonkwa.

The injured were identified as 8-year-old Shadrack Luka; Jacob Kazah; Jacob Achi; Patrick Markus; Anthony Luka; Timothy Jacob; Sunday Julius; Ishaya Jacob; Christopher Anthony; Joseph Jacob; Happy Ishaya (another woman also shot outside the church building); and Ayuba Dabo.

Mallam said the church has suspended both early morning and evening mass as his parishioners fear another attack.

"It appears that there is no government in Nigeria," he said. "If not, how can Christians be slaughtered in northern Nigeria and the government is unable to stop this carnage?"

Ishaku Luka, village head of Tabak 1, told Compass that his people were peace-loving and have never had any conflicts with area Muslims.

"I wonder why we should now become the target of their attacks," he said. "We are sad about this attack, as it has affected us negatively. I want to appeal to the Nigerian government to take immediate measures to halt these attacks by Muslims on Christians."

Luka said one of the women killed, Hassana Luka, had recognized one of her attackers as a Muslim who had once lived in the area.

"She called his name as Ado Ali before she was killed, and Anthony, who was hidden nearby, heard her calling the name," Luka told Compass.

In Kurmin-Bi, another predominantly Christian village near Zonkwa, eyewitness Bitrus Musa told Compass that the attack took place at about 10 p.m. on Friday (Nov. 4).

"Three Christian friends, Hassan Peter, Sunday Bayil, and Anthony Yariyet, had met at Yariyet's house and were chatting when, suddenly, Muslim gunmen emerged from bushes around the house to attack them," Musa said. "Hassan Peter was shot on the head, and he died instantly, while my brother, Sunday Bayil, was shot on his legs."

Again soldiers were alerted, and they arrived to remove Peter's body and the injured Bayil to the St. Louis Catholic Hospital.

Musa said there was no doubt that the assailants were Muslim extremists; he said the gang members phoned area residents on Saturday (Nov. 5) warning Christians of another attack.

"They told us through a phone call that they will be returning again to attack us," Musa said.

The Kaduna state assaults were similar to the guerrilla method Muslim extremists have used to attack Christian communities in Bauchi and Plateau states in Nigeria. They strike, kill members of a family or a group of Christians, and then withdraw, only to strike again in another community as military personnel are struggling to defend the previously attacked community.

Nigeria's population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to Operation World.

Christian mother of five in Nigeria killed

Soldiers containing inter-religious youth fighting shoot her in her home

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (24.10.2011) / HRWF (03.11.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Nigerian soldiers summoned to stop inter-religious fighting between Muslim and Christian youths last week shot and killed a Christian mother of five in the Yelwa area of Bauchi city, according to family and church sources.

Soldiers were called in to restore calm following fighting that broke out at a high school soccer match on Thursday (Oct. 20), and later three Muslim soldiers shot and killed Charity Augustine Agbo and a Christian boy. The circumstances leading to the shooting of the boy, who is unrelated to Agbo, were not immediately known, and his name was not disclosed.

“There was not any justifiable reason for the soldiers to have shot the woman,” said the Rev. Lawi Pokti, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bauchi State.

Pokti confirmed the shooting of the boy, who was initially reported as having been killed, and said he had been resuscitated in a hospital.

Augustine Agbo, husband of the murdered woman, told reporters that three soldiers shot his wife after storming their house on Lagos Street in the Yelwa area of the city.

“Three soldiers arrived in a Hilux vehicle with siren blaring, scaring us and forcing us to run into our houses,” he reportedly said. “When we all ran inside, we saw these three soldiers coming to our house; then we locked the outside gate, but the soldiers followed us and broke the glass door and forced the door open and shot my wife twice on the chest.”

Agbo reported the shooting to the Army commander in Bauchi, and his soldiers later came to his house to take his wife to an area clinic owned by the Church of Christ in Nigeria, he reportedly said.

“After they left, the situation became worse, forcing us to take her to the ATBU Teaching Hospital, where she later died,” he told reporters.

The inter-religious violence erupted during a soccer game at the Baba Tanko Secondary School in Kagadama, a part of the Yelwa area, and then spread to other parts of Bauchi city. Other Muslims reportedly joined Muslim students from the school, attacked Christians and set their homes ablaze.

The Baba Tanko Secondary School is known as a hotbed of Islamic extremism, with Christian sources saying that most religious conflicts in Bauchi have been triggered by Muslim students at the school. In 2007, Muslim students along with other Muslims attacked Christians, killing dozens of them and destroying Christian-owned homes.

Mohammed Majeed Ali, assistant commissioner of police with the Bauchi State Police Command, confirmed the outbreak of the religious violence; he told Compass that the crisis has been contained.

For more than a decade, Christians in Bauchi state have been under pressure from Muslim extremists who have destroyed Christian worship places and killed Christians, said Pokti of CAN. Earlier this year, the Rev. Ishaku Kadah and his wife were abducted and killed, as was pastor Irimiya Maigida.

"I want to make it categorically clear that enough is enough, because despite the fact that the Christian community has constantly remained peaceful, it has become a target for these extremist Muslims even when there is peace," he said.

Pokti faulted the government for being slow to prosecute Muslim extremists.

"Because of lack of pro-active measures by the government to ensure peace in Christian areas in the state, Christians are being killed by Muslim extremists, and none of them has been brought to book," he said. "The lukewarm attitude of the Nigerian government to problems of persecution facing Christians has made it easy for Muslim extremists to attack Christians and get away with such crimes."

Islamic extremist group kills another Christian in Nigeria

Evangelist sent to northern Nigeria's Borno state is slain after staff was evacuated

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (17.10.2011) / HRWF (19.10.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Violence-weary Christians in Borno state have been further upset to learn of the murder of a Nigerian evangelist by Boko Haram less than three months after the Islamic extremist group killed a Maiduguri pastor.

Already shell-shocked from attacks by Boko Haram, which was originally based in Borno state, Christians again took cover after the Aug. 27 shooting of Mark Ojunta, a 36-year-old evangelist from southern Nigeria who was ministering amid the Kotoko people of Nigeria's northeastern state with Calvary Ministries (CAPRO). He was killed in Maiduguri.

CAPRO International Director Amos Aderonmu said Ojunta died "as a martyr on his field among the Kotokos." CAPRO had learned that all its staff members working among the Shuwa Arab, Kotoko and Kanuri peoples were on a Boko Haram list of people to be killed and had evacuated them, Aderonmu said.

Ojunta had returned to teach a class after the evacuation of his family.

"Brother Mark took his family out on Friday (Aug. 26), but he went back to the field because he had a class with some believers on Saturday," Aderonmu reported. "It was in the night that the sect came to where they were staying and knocked at the door, and he tried to escape but could not get away."

In his statement, Aderonmu said that four days before his death, Ojunta had received an invitation to leave work among the Kotoko people to take a position at CAPRO's International office in London.

"On Wednesday of that week, brother Kola Kehinde, our national coordinator in the U.K., spoke with him about the possibility of him coming to join the U.K. team," Aderonmu reported. "His response was that he wanted to invest more years into the work among the Kotokos and hand it over to believers before he can consider leaving. What a passion and commitment! Four days later, he was translated into the presence of his Master."

Aderonmu said that Ojunta was the "first martyr in CAPRO in our 36 years of existence as a ministry." Ojunta is survived by his wife, Ema, and two children, 3-year-old Kambe and 9-month-old Akira, besides his parents and sisters.

He was buried in his home state of Abia, in southern Nigeria, on Sept. 30.

The killing came less than three months after the June 7 murder of a Church of Christ in Nigeria pastor and his church secretary in Maiduguri. The Rev. David Usman, 45, and church secretary Hamman Andrew were shot by members of Boko Haram in an area of Maiduguri called the Railway Quarters. The area was the base of Boko Haram until 2009, when Nigerian security agencies and the military demolished its headquarters and captured and killed the sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and some of his followers.

Boko Haram leaders have openly declared that they want to establish an Islamic theocratic state in Nigeria, and they reject democratic institutions, which they associate with Christianity. The Jama'atu ahlus Sunnah lid da'awati wal Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, has claimed responsibility for several church bombings and other attacks. Many Christians have left Maiduguri, and some churches have shut down as many of their members have lost their lives.

Compass has witnessed many church buildings shuttered and guarded by soldiers and police in Maiduguri.

Calvary Ministries began in April 1975 in the city of Zaria, in the heartland of Nigeria's Muslim north, through the evangelistic efforts of young Nigerian graduates from various Nigerian universities doing their one-year mandatory national youth service. The ministry now has more than 550 workers in 27 countries of Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

Nigeria's population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to Operation World.

Northern Nigeria climbed to 23rd place in 2010 from 27th in 2009 on Christian support organization Open Doors' World Watch List of nations with the worst persecution.

Muslim extremists from Niger help kill Christians in Nigeria

Boy, 10, and security guard for local official among those slain

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (31.08.2011) / HRWF (01.09.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Armed Muslims from Niger entered Nigeria's Kaduna state this month to help Islamists there invade Christian communities, where they killed two Christians, including a 10-year-old boy, area sources said.

In the early morning hours of Aug. 21, the Muslim extremists entered Fadiya Bakut village in Bajju district of the Zango-Kataf Local Government Area, and attacked the home of Andrew Allahmagani, the district head in Fadiya, Allahmagani told Compass by telephone.

Allahmagani said he was sleeping that morning when he suddenly heard gunshots near his residence.

"They [the attackers] later moved around the house shooting into windows and doors, including that of my wife," he said. "Afterward, they moved to the quarters of my brother, where they shot and killed my nephew, Fidelis Ishaku, who was 10 years old, and shot and injured my mother, who is 70."

A Christian security guard at the house, 52-year-old Zaman Kaki, was also killed in the attack by about 10 assailants armed with guns, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons, Allahmagani said. Kaki leaves behind a wife and four children.

The slain boy's grandmother, Laraba Ishaku, received a life-threatening wound in the thigh but survived after receiving treatment at Zonkwa Medical Center, he said. Also receiving hospital treatment for wounds was Bartholomew Ishaku, 20, and 31-year-old Clement Yohanna, he said.

Eyewitness Danjuma Sarki told Compass that about 30 spent shells were recovered from the scene of the attack, which kept many Christians from meeting for church services that day.

"The attackers wore black uniforms and shot sporadically," Sarki said.

Jonathan Asake, a former member of Nigeria's National Assembly, told Compass by phone that he got to the scene of the incident at about 7 a.m. and found Allahmagani's house littered with spent bullet shells, and some 20 bullets were also collected.

"The invaders who came as early as 12:30 a.m. to Fadiya Bakut village shot dead a lad who was caught by the bullet while fleeing with his mother," he added.

The former legislator said Christians in the community "summoned courage and chased the fleeing invaders. It was then brought to their attention, that a man with blood-stained clothes was sighted within the vicinity by dawn. A quick search uncovered the suspect. He was on the verge of being lynched when the police came to his rescue. He is now at the Zonkwa police station."

Kaduna State Police Spokesman Aminu Lawal confirmed the attacks, saying one of the assailants has been arrested.

"It is true that a security guard was killed, and a small boy was also killed," he said. "The target was not only the Christian community leader but also the Fadiya Bakut community."

On July 24 at about 1 a.m., Muslim marauders moving in three groups also attacked the villages of Angwan Yaro and Angwan Yuli in Sanga Local Government Area of the State, area residents said. The attacks forced Christians to stay away from worship services in order to keep watch on their communities.

Saidu Mallam, a Christian and a resident of Angwan Yaro village, told Compass that they learned of the planned invasion by Muslim militants and decided to take prompt action.

"We got urgent information that strange Muslim gunmen have been noticed approaching our area, and we became worried and woke all of our people only to see the armed Muslims in groups," Mallam said. "The first group of Muslims numbered about 200, while the second and the third groups numbered about 300."

The first and the second groups did not begin attacking until the last group arrived, he said.

"They had guns, swords and other local weapons with some of them holding petrol in cans," Mallam said. "We were outnumbered as we had no arms. However, we resisted the invasion and they fled. We captured 15 of them. They have been handed over to soldiers who were drafted in to save us. The soldiers took them away."

Mallam said the gunmen were no doubt from Niger, called Nigeriens.

"They are strange people that you can identify as Nigeriens, and even their accent can convince you that they are not Nigerians," he said. "We have never experienced this kind of situation; we could not hold church services because we are still afraid. Some of the militants escaped into the bush, and we don't know what may happen in the night, though soldiers are here now."

Niger, 97 percent Muslim, has seen the rise of Islamic extremists groups in recent years, according to Operation World. It lies on Nigeria's Muslim-majority northern border.

Some of the Christians injured in the attacks are receiving treatment at General Hospital, Kafanchan. Three of the injured Christians were identified as Samuel Hassan, Maiwada Buki and Nyako Makeri.

The Rev. Joe Yari, spokesman for the Northern Nigerian Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), confirmed the attacks.

"All security agencies are aware about these attacks on Christian communities in the state," said Yari, who is also the CAN chairman of the Jema'a Local Government Area.

Nigeria's population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to Operation World.

Northern Nigeria climbed to 23rd place in 2010 from 27th in 2009 on Christian support organization Open Doors' World Watch List of nations with the worst persecution.

Nigerian army said to help in slaughter of Christians

Plateau state governor fears alleged involvement of soldiers sets dangerous precedent

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (28.08.2011) / HRWF (29.08.2011) <http://www.hrwf.org> – Muslim extremists with the alleged help of Nigerian army personnel killed 24 Christians this month in central Nigeria's Plateau state, area sources said.

The attacks started Aug. 11 in Ratsa Foron village, where assaults that day and on Aug. 15 left six Christians dead; also on Aug. 15 in Heipang village, Muslim extremists killed nine members of one Christian family along with another Christian, the sources said.

"They were in army uniform. I even know some of them; they came along with the Muslims to attack us," said a tearful Nnaji John, who lost her family in the attack. "I can swear to God Almighty that the attack was carried out with the support of the soldiers; I saw them."

Attacks on Aug. 21 in Kwi, Loton, and Jwol villages killed six more Christians, said the sources, who added that Nigerian army soldiers participated in the assaults or at least accompanied the assailants.

In the community of Chwelnyap in Jos on Aug. 14, Muslim extremists killed two Christians and injured one woman, the area sources said.

Chollom Gyangof Chwelnyap confirmed that the Aug. 14 attack on his neighborhood was carried out with the support or tacit approval of Muslims in the army's Special Task Force (STF), a unit designed to stop sectarian attacks.

"The attackers were the very soldiers deployed to the area to ensure protection of the people," Gyang said. "One of the victims received a call from the STF men in the area to come out and assist, only to get gunned down by them as he stepped out from his house."

Gyang said area residents found identification cards of Muslim soldiers, berets and other pieces of their uniforms in the villages that were attacked.

Plateau Gov. Jonah Jang called for immediate withdrawal of the Nigerian army because, he said, Muslims in the army have taken sides with Islamist assailants.

"I am convinced that the armed forces are being polluted with the religious crisis in the country," Jang said. "Before now, the military personnel used to stay in the barracks, but today the armed forces have started taking sides in this religious crisis, and if they are not called to order it will be dangerous for the country."

Bitrus Kaze, representative for Jos in Nigeria's National Assembly, said in a recent press conference that there have been other times that military ID cards and pieces of uniforms have been found at the scene of sectarian attacks.

"It is a very sad testimony of the STF," he said. "And what worries me is that in spite of that grievous allegation, it appears to me that STF has not come out, at least to deny it. It is really very strange and worrisome to me that in a scene of such a heinous crime, where a family of nine was wiped out, and an allegation of this nature was leveled against the military, it says nothing about it."

Capt. Charles Ekeocha, spokesman of the task force deployed to Heipang to stop the attacks, did not expressly address the allegations, but he confirmed the number killed in the attack and said, "My troops went to the area to repel the attack."

Sources told Compass the slain family members at Heipang village, who were associated with the Redeemed Christian Church of God, were Nnamdi John, Ekeoma John, Ebere John, Elechi John Aboh, Gift Amechi, Ighechi Amechi, Amarachi John, Obed Amechi, Uchenna Amechi; the other area Christian was Joseph Davou.

Sources said those murdered in Ratsa Foron were Pam John and his son, Elijah; Gwom Gyang; Deme Dung Tsok; Samuel Gwom; and Adamu Gwong.

Daniel Deni, who represents Riyom in the Plateau State House of Assembly, confirmed the attacks on Jwol, Kwi, and Loton villages.

"Three Christians were killed in Loton village in Jos district, while the other was killed in Kwi, all in Riyom Local Government area," he told Compass by phone. "In fact as I am talking to you, I am in the bush with the sector commander and his men, and they are in search of the attackers."

Alamveabee Efihraim Idyorough, a Christian who lives in the Jos suburb of Anaguta, said his neighborhood has been attacked multiple times over the past 10 years.

"Do Christian ethnic minorities not have the right to exist in Nigeria?" Idyorough asked. "Are Christians not citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria?"

Two bombs explode near churches in Jos

Police probe motives for weekend blasts in areas where Islamic sect leaders live

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (02.08.2011) / HRWF (17.08.2011) <http://www.hrwf.org> – Security officials are trying to determine suspects and motives for two weekend bomb explosions in predominantly Muslim areas of Jos where three churches and the residences of Islamic sect leaders are located.

The explosions led many Christians to remain indoors on Sunday (July 31). One bomb exploded on Saturday night (July 30) in the Angwan Rimi area of Jos near a Baptist Church building no longer in use because of previous damage by Muslim extremists. A second bomb exploded early Sunday morning near a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) building on Sarkin Mangu Street and an Assemblies of God sanctuary in the Kwarrarafa Area, according to police reports obtained by Compass.

No one was hurt in either of the explosions.

Prominent Islamic leaders residing in the area of the Sunday morning blast include Sheik Balarabe Dawud, chief imam of Jos Central Mosque, and Sheik Sani Yahaya, leader of the Izala Islamic sect.

The churches near both blasts are located in areas that are predominantly Muslim because of displacement of Christians during religious conflict earlier this year. Christians have been forced to relocate to safer areas of the city.

Fears that large-scale violence by the Islamic extremist Boko Haram sect would seize Nigeria at the end of July, on the two-year anniversary of the death of the group's leader, were not borne out.

The explosion on Saturday (July 30), from a bomb disguised as an empty can of groundnut oil, occurred in an area of Jos where Sheikh Saidu Hassan, deputy leader of the Izala Islamic sect, lives. The bomb exploded in the Angwan Rimi area at about 9:30 p.m., according to police.

An incident report obtained by Compass at the Angwar Rogo police station states that the bomb caused no death or injury but shattered the windows of a parked taxi.

The explosions occurred a week after five persons were killed in violence that broke out on July 26 between Muslims and Christians in the Angwan Rukuba area of Jos.

"Five people have been confirmed dead and 12 seriously injured," said Capt. Charles Ekeocha, spokesman of the Special Task Force of a Special Military Operation in Jos to restore peace.

The Angwan Rukuba area became a hotbed of violence in Jos following multiple bomb explosions there last Christmas Eve. The bombs went off in three different locations in

the area, killing over 100 Christians and injuring many others. Security agencies confirmed they were planted by members of the Boko Haram sect.

Emmanuel Dipo Ayeni, commissioner of police for Plateau state, called for calm over the explosions and said police were working hard to discover those responsible.

Christian communities near town in Nigeria disappearing

Islamist attacks drive Christians from two villages in Bauchi state; two Christians dead

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct (14.06.2011) / HRWF (21.06.2011) - www.hrwf.org – In a village outside this Bauchi state town in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria, what was once a Christian community has vanished.

Last March the Christian peasant farmers of Mdandi village, eight kilometers (five miles) northwest of the Government Girls Secondary School in Tafawa Balewa town, were busy harvesting crops and preparing for a new farming season. On March 27 scores of armed, hard-line Islamists – avoiding the surrounding Muslim villages – descended on Mdandi, destroyed the Christians' homes and drove them out, former residents said.

The attack on Mdandi was preceded by an assault on Feb. 10, believed to have been the fall-out of violence rooted in Muslim and Christian youths fighting over a Muslim's Jan. 27 burning of a Christian's billiards table. Some Christians were injured in the Feb. 10 attack.

"On their first attack, we fought back, defending ourselves and our families," said Luka Zafi, pastor of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation in the village. "And not being able to force us out, they retreated. We had thought that we would not be attacked again. But you see, they left and returned the second time with more of them, and all armed with guns. We could not fight back since we do not have arms to fight them. We ran out of the village, and they destroyed our two church buildings and our houses."

Pastor Zafi, whose house was gutted in the March 27 attack, said his church building along with a Roman Catholic Church building were set ablaze. Area Christians are now living as displaced persons in Tafawa Balewa town, while some of his members have moved to the suburb of Nahuta village.

Prior to the attacks, Pastor Zafi's church had 50 members, he said; they are now scattered among various villages. A Compass visit to the village found Muslim Fulani nomads had taken it over and were using it to graze their cattle.

The marauders were believed to have been Islamists from other parts of Bauchi state collaborating with local Muslims and Fulani herdsmen. The Christians said they believe they were targeted, as the assailants bypassed surrounding Muslim communities.

Pastor Zafi lamented that three months after the attacks, the Christians have received no assistance from the state or federal governments.

"We appeal that they help resettle my people back in Mdandi village," he said. "The government can do this by assisting the community to rebuild their destroyed churches

and houses.”

One reason the government has been slow to check Islamist aggression is that neither officials nor Western news agencies question false claims that the ethnic Seyawa Christians steal the Fulani Muslim herdsmen’s cattle, the supposed reason for the Fulani attacks, according to area Christians. They said many people are not aware that some local Christian farmers also own cattle and have never stolen them from the Muslim nomads.

Because the religious crisis in neighboring Plateau state has also been portrayed as communal property squabbles, the government has limited its response and many lives of Christians have been lost because of inaction, they said.

Pastor Zafi said the need for the government to halt the attacks of the Muslim militants in northern Nigeria was more important than restoring the Christians’ property.

“Unless this is done, I am afraid, Christians in this part of the country may be on their way to extinction,” he told Compass.

Following the gutting of their church building, his congregation used the primary school in Nahuta village as their worship place, he said.

“But because we did not have houses to live in around there, we had to disperse to the various villages in search of abodes,” he said. “So the church members no longer meet to worship together.”

COCIN has reassigned Pastor Zafi to assist with another church in Nahuta village as an associate pastor.

Nigeria’s population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to Operation World.

Neighboring Violence

Muslim extremists also attacked Gumel, another Christian village in Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area, in February – leaving two Christians dead, destroying three church buildings, burning more than 50 houses and displacing more than 300 residents, Christian leaders said.

Killed in the Feb. 5 attack was COCIN church elder Mallam Riga Ubandoma, they said. A 14-year-old girl, Numkwi William, died from a snake bite while fleeing from the assailants.

Residents have taken refuge in Tafawa Balewa town. Ishaya Magaji, 65, pastor of the displaced Gumel COCIN church, told Compass that the Muslim aggressors took them by surprise at 5 p.m. that day.

“They overpowered us, so we had to flee with our wives and children,” Pastor Magaji said. “They burned our houses and destroyed our properties.”

Before the attack, Magaji said, his church had about 166 members; now all of them have been displaced. Pastor Magaji and his wife, Saratu Magaji, are living with their nine children at the house of other Christians until they receive help to find a new home.

"We cannot return to the village – not only because our houses have been destroyed, but because the Muslims have taken over the village and are using the place as a grazing field for the Fulani Muslims in the area," Magaji said.

Besides the COCIN church building, the Muslim extremists also destroyed the buildings of a Roman Catholic parish and an Evangelical Church Winning All congregation. He said most of the villagers have been displaced to other towns and villages in Tafawa Balewa, including Rafin Ganba, Bwar, Mantokshin, and Nahuta.

Bulus James, a Gumel village teacher, is among those displaced.

"I was in my house that evening when I heard gunshots all over," James said. "I ran out of my house, only to see a large number of armed men shooting at our people, setting fire on houses and churches. I had no choice than to run into the bush, and that is how I survived the attack. Since then I have not gone to the village, because the Muslims have taken over the area."

James, who now teaches at the COCIN Metropolitan School in Tafawa Balewa, estimated the number of raiders at about 200 and said they were carrying guns.

Magaji, saying the attack on the village was part of an extremist jihad (Islamic war) being waged against Christians in Bauchi state, said Muslims easily attacked the Christian village because it is surrounded by the Muslim villages of Yamgar, Wurogara, Shafali, and Sakom.

"We have lost all that we have and have nowhere to turn," he said. "The government should help us by rebuilding our churches and homes so that we can all return to the village."

Attempts by Compass to visit Gumel with Magaji were thwarted, as they were chased away by nomadic Muslim Fulani herdsmen who have taken over the village.

Nigerian Islamists open fire on beer garden, kill four

AFP (13.06.2011) / HRWF (27.06.2011) - www.hrwf.org – Kano, Nigeria - Suspected members of a radical Islamic sect have shot dead four people at a beer garden in a north Nigerian town where the group recently staged bomb and gun attacks, police said Monday.

"Four people were killed in an attack by gunmen suspected to be members of Boko Haram sect on a beer parlour in the Bulunkutu suburb of the city last night," Zakari Adamu, assistant police commissioner for Borno state told AFP.

The attack occurred in Maiduguri, the northeastern city which has been the focus of many attacks and where the group staged an uprising two years ago.

"The gunmen opened fire on people drinking in the beer parlour, killing four before engaging in a shootout with police who were attracted to the scene by gunshots", Adamu said on the phone from Maiduguri.

The assailants escaped.

Although Borno state is one of the 12 northern Nigerian states that have adopted the Muslim Sharia law, which bans alcohol, people there still drink beer openly.

The attack came a week after multiple bomb explosions and shootings targeting two police stations and a church rocked the city.

At least 14 people, including a pentecostal church pastor, were killed and 17 others seriously injured in the attacks.

Police have intensified surveillance in Maiduguri since last week's attacks, leading to 19 arrests and the recovery of weapons including two rocket launchers and kalashnikov rifles.

"We arrested 14 people along with the weapons while five others were arrested for bringing in bombs into the city," said Adamu.

The suspects have been taken to the police headquarters in Nigeria's capital Abuja for further investigation, he said.

Boko Haram, also known as the Nigerian Talibans, launched an uprising in 2009 which was put down by a brutal military assault that left hundreds dead.

The sect, which has pushed for the creation of an Islamic state, has been blamed for shootings of police and community leaders, bomb blasts and raids on churches, police stations and a prison.

Pastor and church official shot dead

Muslim militants of Boko Haram blamed for killings in Borno state

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct (10.06.2011) / HRWF (21.06.2011) - www.hrwf.org – Muslim extremists from the Boko Haram sect on Tuesday (June 7) shot and killed a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) pastor and his church secretary in Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria's Borno state.

The Rev. David Usman, 45, and church secretary Hamman Andrew were the latest casualties in an upsurge of Islamic militancy that has engulfed northern Nigeria this year, resulting in the destruction of church buildings and the killing and maiming of Christians.

The Rev. Titus Dama Pona, pastor with the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Maiduguri, told Compass that Pastor Usman was shot and killed by the members of the Boko Haram near an area of Maiduguri called the Railway Quarters, where the slain pastor's church is located.

Pona said Christians in Maiduguri have become full of dread over the violence of Boko Haram, which seeks to impose sharia (Islamic law) on northern Nigeria.

"Christians have become the targets of these Muslim militants – we no longer feel free moving around the city, and most churches no longer carry out worship service for fear of becoming targets of these unprovoked attacks," Pona said.

Officials at COCIN's national headquarters in Jos, Plateau state, confirmed the killing of Pastor Usman. The Rev. Logan Gongchi of a COCIN congregation in Kerang, Jos, told Compass that area Christians were shocked at the news.

Gongchi said he attended Gindiri Theological College with Pastor Usman beginning in

August 2003, and that both of them were ordained into pastoral ministry on Nov. 27, 2009.

"We knew him to be very gentle, an introvert, who was always silent in the class and only spoke while answering questions from our teachers," Gongchi said. "He had a simple lifestyle and was easygoing with other students. He was very accommodating and ready at all times to withstand life's pressures – this is in addition to being very jovial."

Gongchi described Usman as "a pastor to the core because of his humility. I remember he once told me that he was not used to working with peasant farmers' working tools, like the hoe. But with time he adapted to the reality of working with these tools on the farm in the school."

Pastor Usman was excellent at counseling Christians and others while they were at the COCIN theological college, Gongchi said, adding that the pastor greatly encouraged him when he was suffering a long illness from 2005 to 2007.

"His encouraging words kept my faith alive, and the Lord saw me overcoming my ill health," he said. "So when I heard the news about his murder, I cried."

Motives

The late pastor had once complained about the activities of Boko Haram, saying that unless the Nigerian government faced up to the challenge of its attacks, the extremist group would consume the lives of innocent persons, according to Gongchi.

"Pastor Usman once commented on the activities of the Boko Haram, which he said has undermined the church not only in Maiduguri, but in Borno state," Gongchi said. "At the time, he urged us to pray for them, as they did not know how the problem will end."

Gongchi advised the Nigerian government to find a lasting solution to Boko Haram's violence, which has also claimed the lives of moderate Muslim leaders and police.

The Railway Quarters area in Maiduguri housed the seat of Boko Haram until 2009, when Nigerian security agencies and the military demolished its headquarters and captured and killed the sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and some of his followers.

The killing of Pastor Usman marked the second attack on his church premises by the Muslim militants. The first attack came on July 29, 2009, when Boko Haram militants burned the church building and killed some members of his congregation.

On Monday (June 6), the militants had bombed the St. Patrick's Catholic Church, along with other areas in Maiduguri, killing three people. In all, 14 people were killed in three explosions at the church and police stations, and authorities have arrested 14 people.

The Boko Haram name is interpreted figuratively as "against Western education," but some say it can also refer to the forbidding of the Judeo-Christian faith. They say the word "Boko" is a corruption in Hausa language for the English word "Book," referring to the Islamic scripture's description of Jews and Christians as "people of the Book," while "Haram" is a Hausa word derived from Arabic meaning, "forbidding."

Boko Haram leaders have openly declared that they want to establish an Islamic theocratic state in Nigeria, and they reject democratic institutions, which they associate with Christianity. Their bombings and suspected involvement in April's post-election violence in Nigeria were aimed at stifling democracy, which they see as a system of government built on the foundation of Christian scripture.

Christians as well as Muslims suffered many casualties after supporters of Muslim presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari lost the April 16 federal election to Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian. Primarily Muslim rioters claimed vote fraud, although international observers praised the polls as the fairest since 1999.

Nigeria's population of more than 158.2 million is almost evenly divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to Operation World.

Muslim extremists burn church building, homes

Compass Direct (16.05.2011) / HRWF (06.06.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Christians from a local Evangelical Church Winning All congregation of this Plateau state town have been displaced after Muslim extremists set their church building and some homes on fire last month. The Rev. Ishaku Danyok of the church told Compass that the April 29 incident occurred after Muslims approached Christian music shop owner Gabriel Kiwase and told him that his music was disturbing them as they said their prayers. The young Christian man quietly switched off the music, and 20 minutes after the Muslims left, they returned and burned down the music shop, then set fire to the pastor's house and the property of five other Christians, Danyok said. The pastor's family, his wife and four children were left homeless, he said. Christians from his church, a Roman Catholic parish and Deeper Life Bible Church in Dengi town lost property in the attack, he added. Danyok said that as a result of the destruction, most members of his church have fled the town, reducing attendance at services to 50. "We currently worship in the destroyed church building with no roof to shield us from the sun and the rains," he said.

Pastor's wife, children among Christians killed in attack

Compass Direct (10.05.2011) / HRWF (06.06.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - As she lay on the ground after being shot and then slashed with a machete, Dune James Rike looked into her husband's tear-filled eyes and asked, "Is this the end between us, so we shall not be together again?" Pastor James Musa Rike told Compass he held the hands of his dying, 35-year-old wife and told her, "Hold on to your faith in Jesus, and we shall meet and never part again." Muslim extremists who attacked Kurum village, in the Bogoro local government area of Nigeria's Bauchi state, had already killed two of their children in a rampage that began Wednesday (May 4) at midnight. Rike, pastor of a Church of Christ in Nigeria congregation in Kurum, next heard the cries of his 13-year-old daughter, Sum James Rike, who lay mortally wounded a few yards away. "She told me that the Muslim militants told her they would kill her and 'see how your Jesus will save you,'" he said. The girl told her father that she responded by telling them that Jesus had already saved her, and that by killing her they would only be making it possible for her to be with Him. Pastor Rike prayed for her as she died. Shooting and setting homes on fire, the Muslim extremists killed 12 other Christians in the attack. Bauchi police reported 16 dead - one man, three women and 12 children. Pastor Rike and his son survived the attack, and his adopted daughter, Whulham James Rike, was injured and receiving treatment at the General Hospital in Bogoro, along with five others. The assailants set more than 20 houses ablaze before leaving the village, police said.

Nigerian church leaders call for probe into election violence

Islamic attacks on churches reflected religious dimension of political conflict, Christians say

By Lekan Otufodunrin

Compass Direct (03.05.2011) / HRWF (05.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Christian leaders have called for an investigation into political violence that targeted churches and Christian homes, with at least one clergyman saying yesterday that Islamic attacks following the election of a Christian president were premeditated.

Pastor Emmanuel Nuhu Kure of Throneroom Trust Ministry based in Kafanchan in Kaduna state, reportedly said at a press briefing in Minna, Niger state that the religious component of the political violence should not be discounted.

"How would you explain a spontaneous call to prayer on most of the loudspeakers of the mosques across the city at the same time, at 9 p.m. or thereabout in the night, with a shout of 'Allah Akbar' as Muslims began to troop towards the mosques and designated areas, to be followed at 10 p.m. with another call on loudspeakers - this time with a spontaneous shout of "Allah Akbar" from the mosques and most of the streets occupied by Muslims and the burst of gunfire sound that shook the whole city?" Pastor Kure said. "This was repeated a few times, and the killings and burnings began."

Christians suffered many casualties in the north-central state of Kaduna after supporters of Muslim presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari lost the April 16 federal election to Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian. Primarily Muslim rioters claimed vote fraud, although international observers praised the polls as the fairest since 1999.

"How come the Muslim fighters . . . were neatly surrounding the walls of the Anglican Cathedral and the Yoruba Baptist pastor's house and setting them on fire while shooting, without any resistance, if it was not premeditated and planned?" Pastor Kure reportedly said.

As many as 300 Christians were reportedly slain in Kaduna, with 14,000 fleeing their homes after Islamic attacks.

Over the weekend Christian leaders in northern Nigeria called for a federal probe into the post-election violence, saying more than 200 church buildings were burned.

"The violence was both political and religious, because Christians, our churches and property, were the main targets for the destruction by the perpetrators of the violence," the chairman and secretary of the northern branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Peter Jatau and Saidu Dogo respectively, said in a press statement on Saturday (April 30).

The violence broke out in some northern states when protesting Muslim youths went on a rampage, attacking mainly Christians, many of whom retaliated with counter offensives. No reliable figure of the total of Christians killed has emerged as church leaders were still trying to make determinations; some assumed dead have shown up later at resettlement camps.

"CAN in 19 northern states feel that the time has come for the federal government to take decisive steps to put the persistent carnage in the north under the guise of religious

fanaticism to a stop and bring the perpetrators to justice," the CAN leaders said their statement.

Bishop Jonas Katung, national vice president of the North Central Zone of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, said in a statement released on Friday (April 29) that the post-election attacks were "a descent into barbarism" in which northern Christians were targeted and subjected to horrendous and relentless acts.

In Katsina – Buhari's home state – 65 churches were either burned or damaged, Katung said, and more than 100 Christian men, women and children from the border town of Jiba have fled to the neighboring Niger Republic.

"Seven Christians were left dead, several people have been wounded and many others have fled to their respective states of origin," he said.

Katung added that 28 Christians in Bauchi state, including the Rev. Isman Dogari of the Evangelical Church of West Africa were killed, while 78 church buildings and other properties were set ablaze between April 16 and 19. In Gombe state, he added, 38 Christians were killed, 17 church buildings and 27 houses were burned. The assailants also set 11 cars on fire. In Zamfara state, five church buildings and one pastor's house were burned; in Jigawa state, 17 churches were burnt in Hadeija and seven in Jahun, he said.

While Christians do not call for vengeance, Katung said there was a need to identify those who instigated the attacks on Christians to prevent them from occurring anew.

"We refuse to accept the subterfuge of 'spontaneous combustion,'" he said. "If we are to curb the repeated propensity to instigate violence, those holding the bellows to the flames of intemperance must be held to account for the logical and expected consequences of their excesses."

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2011 Annual Report, released on Thursday (April 28), recommended Nigeria be placed on the U.S. Department of State's list of worst violators of religious freedom. It cited the Nigerian government as "tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom by failing to respond adequately and effectively to prevent and contain acts of religiously-related violence, prevent reprisal attacks, and bring those responsible for such violence to justice."

USCIRF has recommended that Nigeria be designated as a Country of Particular Concern, or CPC, since 2009.

"Years of inaction by Nigeria's federal and state governments have created a climate of impunity, resulting in thousands of death," the report states. "Other religious freedom concerns in Nigeria include the expansion of *sharia* (Islamic law) into the criminal codes of several northern Nigerian states and discrimination against minority communities of Christians and Muslims."

Northern Nigeria climbed to 23rd place in 2010 from 27th in 2009 on Christian support organization Open Doors' World Watch List of nations with the worst persecution.

"Persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria originates from the non-equality between Muslims and non-Muslims based upon certain interpretations of the holy scriptures of Islam," the organization said in its rankings, released in January. "In the history of the region, the Hausa-Fulani Muslims of north Nigeria applied this notion of non-equality to all non-Muslims they conquered in their 19-century jihad."

Nigeria's population of more than 158.2 million is almost evenly divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to *Operation World*.

Nigerian violence claims lives of Christians

Cycle of attacks sparked by Christmas Eve bombings leaves growing list of victims

By Lekan Otufodunrin and Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct (04.02.2011) / HRWF (05.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Amid sectarian violence by Muslims, Christians and security forces in this capital city of Plateau state, a flash point for ethnic and religious conflict in Nigeria, scores of Christians were estimated to have been killed in the past month.

Christmas Eve bombings by Islamic extremists have touched off tit-for-tat violence that has killed more than 200 people in Plateau state, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW). A Jan. 27 report by HRW said the Christmas bombings in Jos left at least 107 dead.

In the predominantly Christian Barkin Ladi Government Area on the outskirts of Jos, Muslim assailants led by a police officer from Abuja on Jan. 27 killed 14 Christians, according to a military spokesman, and the next day Muslim youths stabbed two students at the University of Jos on the assumption that they were Christians.

Capt. Charles Ekeocha, spokesman for the Special Task Force (STF) charged with maintaining order in Jos, said the Muslim attackers in the Barkin Ladi area invaded four Christian villages in the early hours of Jan. 27, killing eight Christians in Dorowa, two in Nding Susut, three in Fanloh and one in Nding Jok. Military forces with assistance of villagers arrested 29 of the assailants, killing two in the process, he said.

"On arrival at [Dorowa] village, the [Christian] youths directed them to the route of the fleeing attackers," Ekeocha said. "The troops of the STF pursued the attackers, who opened fire on sighting us. Two of the attackers were killed; one of our soldiers was also shot. Two AK-47 rifles, two pistols and ammunition were recovered. One AK-47 and a pistol were also found in a mosque there."

Ekeocha said policeman Mohammed Uba led the attacks against the Christian communities and was arrested. Uba, from the 44 Police Mobile Force in Abuja, was carrying firearms and four cartridges, Ekeocha added.

At the University of Jos, weekend clashes between students and Hausa Muslim youths following an attack by the youths on Jan. 28 left at least four persons dead and 20 injured. A former student of the university who requested anonymity noted that the attack was due to the university being seen as an institution controlled and dominated by Christians.

"It was simply an attack on a perceived Christian-dominated institution – one of very few institutions still functional in Jos," said the source, though quick to add that area violence is more politically motivated than religious. "It seems their aim was to paralyze everything in Jos, and so force the state government to accede to their demands."

A Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) partner in Jos reported that STF soldiers did nothing as the Muslim youths stabbed two students; when other students protested their inaction, the soldiers shot at them, injuring seven.

Clashes between the students and Muslims the next day led to Christian homes and shops being set ablaze, allegations of soldiers mistakenly shooting at the youths rushing to save their businesses, and retaliatory burnings of Muslim homes and businesses, according to HART. A soldier reportedly fired at youths in the predominantly Christian area of Farin Gada, killing a 6-year-old boy.

"The military have been so compromised that Muslims want only Muslim soldiers in their areas, and Christians are calling for only Christian soldiers," said a HART source. "There have been some very questionable killings of civilians by soldiers."

At press time, at least four persons were reported killed in the weekend clashes, and 20 Christian students were receiving hospital treatment.

Protest marches

On Monday (Jan. 31), thousands of Christian women in Plateau state held a protest march in Jos, calling for the removal of the STF. Clad in black, the women accused the STF force of bias and of shooting at innocent Christians. They urged the federal government to reconstitute it.

Muslim women clad in white held a counter-protest on Thursday (Feb. 3) in support of the STF. They accused other security forces of indiscriminate arrests and shooting at innocent Muslims.

Previously Brig. Gen. Hassan Umaru, commander of the STF, said the task of restoring peace is challenging as Muslim extremists have perfected guerrilla warfare tactics.

"The situation in Jos has always dared the entire security system in the country and is now gradually assuming a new dimension," he said in a message read at a recent funeral. "It is a new challenge for security agencies."

Christian groups have also accused soldiers and police of taking sides.

"We deplore the many instances where Muslim soldiers have aided and participated in the attack on villages," the North Central Zone of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) stated in a Jan. 24 newspaper advertisement signed by the Rev. J.K. Katung, PFN national vice president, and the Rev. S. Dangana, PFN secretary. "In a Christian-dominated state such as Plateau, we wonder why the entire commanding structure of the state police command should be headed by Muslims."

Citing heavy casualty figures, the Christian leaders accused the Muslim minority of trying to take control of the state. The PFN condemned a call by the Plateau State Chapter of the Muslim Council of Ulama calling for a state of emergency as a solution to the Jos violence, which they said would lead to Muslim control.

"The ill-concealed Islamic agenda of the Ulama is to make Plateau state ungovernable so as to justify the truncating of democracy," they stated. "It is indeed a demonstration of insensitivity to Christian sensibilities that this Islamic group will come out barely four weeks after the unprovoked bombing of Christians preparing for Christmas celebration by an Islamic terrorist to demand for a state of emergency in the state."

The Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kwashi, archbishop of the Jos archdiocese of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, said at a recent funeral service for 16 Christians killed in Jebbu Bass village that Muslim extremists have not been reined in.

"The church has been the major receiver of the effects of every crisis in this state, and politics is only being used as a cover-up," he said.

The Rev. Mwelbish Dafes and the Rev. Chuwang Davou, chairman and secretary respectively of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Plateau state chapter, said in a Jan. 23 statement that, "there seems to be no serious attempt to properly handle the situation, either in forestalling future occurrences or purposefully prosecuting the perpetrators in order to serve as a deterrent to others."

After several bombings by the Islamic extremist Boko Haram in Christian areas of Jos on Dec. 24, 2010 that killed scores of people, the Christian communities of Dogon Karfe, Anglo Jos, and Bukuru (Agwan Doki) came under heavy attacks from Muslim militants. As a result, Grace of Apostolic Church in the Dogon Karfe area of Jos city was demolished, sources said.

In Maiduguri, capital of Borno state in northern Nigeria, a Baptist pastor and five other Christians were killed 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 congregation in Sinimari by the outlawed Islamic Boko Haram, which is opposed to Western education.

Prior to the bombings, talk of Muslim militants vowing to ensure that Christians did not celebrate Christmas had spread around Jos. Christian leaders said they were surprised that in spite of this open secret, security agencies made no efforts to ensure that these Muslim extremists did not carry out their threats.

An uneasy calm has come over Jos since the weekend attacks, protests and counter-protests.

"Nobody is sure of what can happen at any time," said Aminu Yusuf, a Jos-based journalist. "For now, there is calm except for the recent clash between the students of the University of Jos and some Muslim Hausa youths. But we are all on alert."

Nigeria clashes kill 200 in a month

Shuaibu Mohammed

Reuters (27.01.2011) / HRWF (31.01.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - More than 200 people have been killed in central Nigeria in the past month in tit-for-tat clashes between rival ethnic and religious gangs, Human Rights Watch said on Thursday.

Many of the victims, including children, were hacked to death or burned alive in dawn attacks on villages and reprisal killings in Plateau state, which lies between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and largely Christian south.

"This terrible cycle of violence and impunity needs to stop," said Corinne Dufka, senior West Africa researcher at the U.S.-based rights group.

"Both the state and federal governments have shown a disturbing lack of urgency in addressing the violence and the underlying causes of these deadly outbreaks," she said.

The tension is rooted in decades of resentment between indigenous groups, mostly Christian or animist, and migrants and settlers from the Muslim north, who are vying for control of fertile farmlands and for economic and political power.

It is largely contained within one region of Africa's most populous nation and does not, on its own, risk derailing presidential, parliamentary and state elections in April.

But it is likely to escalate in the run-up to the polls and gives President Goodluck Jonathan's administration a third security challenge on top of attacks by a radical Islamic sect in the remote northeast and the threat of renewed violence in the oil-producing Niger Delta, on its southern coast.

There have been almost daily clashes between Christian and Muslim mobs in villages around Jos, the capital of Plateau state, since a series of bombs were detonated during Christmas Eve celebrations a month ago, killing scores of people.

At least 12 people were killed in the latest attack on mostly Christian villages near Barkin Ladi, just outside Jos, late on Wednesday. A special task force of police and soldiers detained 29 suspects from the northern Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, whom they paraded before journalists.

"On sighting the troops, the attackers opened fire on them. In the exchange of fire, two people were killed and 29 captured alive," taskforce spokesman Charles Ekeocha said.

Call for UN investigation

A statement on a militant Islamist website claimed the December bombs were carried out by Boko Haram, a radical sect in the remote northeast, but there was no independent confirmation and the attacks were beyond the sect's usual area of operation.

Some security sources believe the bombs were set off to provoke clashes between Christians and Muslims in a region where thousands have died in religious and ethnic violence over the past decade.

Human Rights Watch catalogued a series of attacks on villages and targeted killings since December.

It called on the Nigerian government to allow the United Nations special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Francis Deng, to visit Plateau, saying his request to do so last September had gone unanswered.

Some members of the Christian community have accused the security forces of backing the mostly Muslim Hausa-Fulani ethnic group during the unrest. The rank and file of the army are from both religions but senior officers stationed in the region are predominantly Muslim, they say.

The military denies the accusations but has faced protests from villagers, who hurled stones and burnt the tents of soldiers earlier this week. [ID:nLDE70N2A1]

Interior Minister Emmanuel Iheanacho told Reuters on Wednesday the government was investigating the possible involvement of soldiers in the violence and declined to comment further until the probe had been concluded.

Religion and region at play in Nigeria election

by Jon Gambrell

AP (12.01.2011) / HRWF (13.01.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Nigeria's ruling political party will pick its presidential candidate Thursday for the April election, a decision that delegates may make based on where the candidate is from rather than what he has to offer.

That vote, pitting President Goodluck Jonathan against former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, highlights the religious and ethnic fault lines still running through the oil-rich nation of 250 ethnicities more than 40 years after its deadly civil war.

Those differences still lead to violence and killings even today and this election, challenging the notions of power-sharing in the ruling party, could stoke the flames.

"Over a period of time, we've come to realize to achieve total integration, unity, peace and stability, power sharing must be part of our political institution," Abubakar said in an interview Wednesday with The Associated Press. "This is ... so that every ethnic nationality has a sense of belonging."

Jonathan, a Christian from the nation's oil-rich southern delta, came into the presidency after the May death of elected leader Umaru Yar'Adua, a northern Muslim. Under an unwritten power-sharing agreement in the ruling People's Democratic Party, the presidency should have been held for another term by a northerner because a southerner had it for the first eight years of democracy in the nation.

However, Jonathan decided to contest the coming election. That decision brought anger from northern leaders fearful of being cut out of the lucrative position of president in a nation fueled by billions of dollars of oil revenues.

Jonathan himself represents a minority ethnic group in the country, the Ijaw from the Niger Delta.

"We've been told a minority cannot be president, but in Jonathan, we are finding a minute minority tribe standing in an election," Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, the director general of Jonathan's campaign, told the AP in an interview Wednesday.

Some hail his ascension as a sign citizens in the country can first identify themselves as "Nigerian" rather than an ethnicity.

In the south, many also believe the region deserves more time in power. Since Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960, the country's history saw military dictators hailing mainly from the country's Muslim north until democracy took hold in 1999. All of the country's oil wealth also flows from the south.

Those in the north "are grumbling because they think they have a right to rule this country," said Charles Dokubo, an analyst at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.

But the north remains a potent force in the country's military and other power structures. "I cannot see how the northern part of this country, which controls 60 percent of the population, would be out of possession for" that long, said Kabiru Mato, a political science professor at the University of Abuja.

As the campaigns of Abubakar, Jonathan and minor candidate Sarah Jubril remain light on policy, they'll rely heavily on personality.

Abubakar, a stern-faced former Customs officer who created an oil and gas empire, faulted Jonathan for being a candidate weak on experience who rose to power on "all accidental positions." Jonathan first became governor of Bayelsa state only after the impeachment of the elected leader, then rose to the vice presidency after being picked by outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Abubakar also criticizes Jonathan for not stopping the religious violence that's killed hundreds in the north over the last year and the recent bombings targeting the capital. He blamed the violence on weakness from Jonathan and the nation's endemic poverty. World Bank statistics suggest most Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day.

"It is frightening to see young, unemployed men asking for money, asking for food, banging on my cars. It's really frightening," Abubakar said Wednesday. "Unless government moves in with massive employment programs, we'll continue to have it."

Jonathan's top campaign manager blamed some of the violence on the candidate's opponents.

"We believe that it is caused by some desperadoes in politics ... to make sure that our candidate, the president, looks like he is not able to control," Tafida said. "It has nothing to do with incapacity or weakness on the part of our president."

However, both candidates have their share of faults. Jonathan's administration arrested the top campaign manager of former military dictator Ibrahim Babangida's failed primary campaign, claiming he was linked to the Oct. 1 bombings that hit Abuja, Nigeria's capital. The bombings killed at least 12 and wounded dozens more. The campaign manager was later released without charges.

Jonathan also remains soft-spoken and appears indecisive on major issues. As the crisis in Ivory Coast reached its peak, Jonathan left members of a regional bloc wanting to speak about the issue this month. He instead went to campaign for a gubernatorial candidate.

Abubakar is trailed by allegations of corruption. U.S. federal agents searched his Maryland home in 2005 as part of their prosecution of fallen U.S. Rep. William Jefferson of Louisiana. A 2010 U.S. Senate report aired allegations that Abubakar and one of his wives funneled more than \$40 million into the country through illegal wire transfers. In his own country, an anti-corruption agency accused him of siphoning \$150 million in oil money from the federal budget.

Abubakar denied all the allegations Wednesday, stressing he never faced any criminal charges.

Yet all of these issues may prove moot with delegates concerned about keeping Nigeria's uneasy democracy rumbling along. To do that, many may simply decide based on where the candidate is from.

"A lot of people always take cover under their individual identities," Mato said. He added: "You don't try to wipe away the colors that make people think they can take part in the federal system."

Nigeria: 13 reported killed in Kuru

This Day (12.01.2011) / HRWF (13.01.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - An attack on a Christian village in Plateau State early this morning left 13 people dead, an official said, according to a CNN report.

At about midnight, the village of Kuru Station, near Jos, was attacked by unknown assailants, Riyom local government chairman Simon Mwadkon told CNN.

Three houses were attacked and 12 people were killed at the scene, he said. Four others were taken to a hospital, where a thirteenth person died.

"The situation is very tense," but security forces are now on the ground, Mwadkon said.

Nigeria has been rocked by recent religious violence, with the government blaming most of the it on Islamist extremists.

Christmas Eve attacks in the volatile city of Jos claimed at least 31 lives.

On March 7, at least 200 Christians villagers were massacred near Jos, and more than 150 Muslims were killed in an attack in a nearby town, Kuru Karama, on January 19.

In Nigeria, more than 13,500 people have died in religious or ethnic clashes since the end of military rule in 1999, Human Rights Watch said in a report last year.

There have been other deadly sectarian clashes in Nigeria over the years, including one outbreak in Jos in September 2001 that left about 1,000 dead, Human Rights Watch said.
