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Twelve die in Christmas attacks on Churches in Northern Nigeria

CSW (26.12.2012) - Six people were killed and two injured when gunmen attacked a church service in a village in Yobe State on Christmas morning. Six others were murdered in an assault on a Christmas Eve service in Borno State.

According to local sources gunmen suspected to be members of the Islamist extremist militia Boko Haram raided Firi Village, situated around 2 kilometres north of Potiskum Town, during the early hours of Christmas Day. They began by attacking the midnight service at the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), where six people were killed, including the church's pastor.

As the attack was underway, residents, many of whom had fled into the bush, sent text messages stating their homes were being set alight and that the security services were yet to arrive at the scene. According to reports received by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), twenty homes and the COCIN church were subsequently razed to the ground.

Local news agencies report that in neighbouring Borno State, gunmen attacked a Christmas Eve service at the First Baptist Church in the capital city Maiduguri killing six people, including a deacon.

Since December 2010, over 45 Christians in five northern states have died in consecutive attacks on Christmas services by Boko Haram. If the recent attacks are confirmed to have been the work of the group, this would constitute the third consecutive year of fatal attacks by Boko Haram on Christmas services and raise the death toll in such attacks to over 55 people.

In his Christmas message Pope Benedict spoke of hope and peace and prayed, amongst other things, for the return of "concord in Nigeria, where savage acts of terrorism continue to reap victims, particularly among Christians."

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of CSW said: "The courage and commitment of Christians in Yobe, Borno and other northern and central states, who continue to celebrate their faith despite the very real threat of violence, is both inspiring and humbling. For the third year in a row we have witnessed cowardly attacks on innocent people who were merely expressing their faith during a significant date in the Christian calendar, a date that symbolises peace and reconciliation. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families that have lost loved ones in these appalling attacks, and along with our sister organisation in Nigeria, we will continue to pray, hope and work for peace and reconciliation in that nation."

Nine Christians killed, four churches burned in Nigeria

Boko Haram suspected in rampage in predominantly Christian area

Open Doors News (04.12.2012) — Nine Christians were killed and four Churches burned in two separate Dec. 1 attacks in northeast Nigeria by gunmen suspected to be members of the Boko Haram Islamist group.

The Christians and a Muslim were killed in Kwaple village, Chibok Local Government Area of Borno state when the Islamic group members went on rampage and burned 20 houses and a Church in the area, while three Churches were burned in Gamboru Ngala.

"I have just received a message from my people at Chibok and Gamboru Ngala that four of our Churches were attacked by the militants this morning and 10 people killed at Kwaple in Chibok LGA," the Borno State Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Rev. Titus Pona, said in a text message to the association's president on Dec. 2.

Nuhu Clark, a former Chibok local government area council chairman, said the attackers entered the village at about 9 p.m. Saturday, then torched houses before using guns and machetes to kill their victims.

"Most of the victims were buried today," Clark said on Sunday. "It is unfortunate that such could happen in such a peaceful village."

According to Pona, the attackers burned The Church of the Brethren, Church of Christ in Nigeria, and Deeper Life Church Gamboru Ngala, and another Church of the Brethren in Chibok.

"It is clearly an attack on Christians by the Boko Haram members in a local government that that is predominantly Christian," said a Christian leader in the region, who requested anonymity because churches had agreed that only the Christian Association of Nigeria chairman would speak to the press. "The government is worried about the implication of this attack and is offering to support the rebuilding of the affected Churches."

The State governor met Monday with state and local officials of the Christian association, the local government area council, and community leaders. They determined how to support the affected families.

"The affected families will be compensated, though life cannot be paid for," said the anonymous Christian leader. "The attack by members of the Islamic group, who are apparently not from the community, was unjustified and we have the assurance of the government that necessary measures will be taken to prevent a reoccurrence."

Sunday Oibe, spokesman for the northern group of the Christian Association of Nigeria, decried the continued attacks on Christians, which he said were not getting enough attention from the government.

"What people get to hear is just a fraction of the attacks Christians are subjected to," Oibe said. "It is unfortunate that when the (Christian Association of Nigeria) president comments on the issue, they accuse him of not being sensitive or raising false alarm. We cannot continue to keep quiet in the face of provocative attacks like last Saturday's attack in Borno."

Borno State is the headquarters of the Boko Haram group that has launched various terrorist attacks in the country, killing hundreds.

Kaduna church hit in Nigeria suicide bomb attack

At least seven people have been killed and dozens injured in a suicide bombing during Mass at a Catholic church in northern Nigeria, officials say.

BBC News (29.10.2012) - An explosive-laden vehicle drove into the church and detonated its load, ripping a hole in the wall and roof.

The attack happened in Kaduna, which has been targeted by Islamist militant group Boko Haram in the recent past.

President Goodluck Jonathan promised to "redouble" his government's efforts to tackle terrorism and violence.

He called the attack part of an "unfortunate and unacceptable trend that threatens the peace and stability of our nation".

A spokesman for the local governor has called for calm, pleading with people on local radio not to retaliate.

The Nigerian Emergency Management Agency told the BBC that Christian youths attacked a vehicle that had come to rescue survivors after the attack, smashing one of the windows.

Unconfirmed reports said at least two people were killed in reprisal attacks by Christians after the bombing.

No group has said it carried out the bombing.

Looking for sanctuary

The attack happened at St Rita's church in the Malali neighbourhood of the city.

The vehicle had been stopped at the security gate outside the church.

The driver initially reversed, but then careered straight through the church wall and detonated the bomb.

Members of the choir are thought to be among the dead and injured.

The church was surrounded by soldiers and police after the blast, and ambulances were taking the injured to hospital.

Nigeria's north has a large Muslim majority whereas the south is most populated by Christians and those who follow traditional religions.

The BBC's Will Ross in Kaduna says many people have come to the city in recent months in search of sanctuary from violence in other parts of northern Nigeria.

Boko Haram is fighting to overthrow the government and impose an extreme form of Islamic law.

The group has said it carried out previous attacks on churches in Kaduna state in June.

At least 50 people were killed in the bombings and the reprisals that followed.

30 people killed as Muslim herdsmen attack Christian village in central Nigeria

AP (17.10.2012) - Nomadic Muslim herdsmen attacked a Christian village in central Nigeria over long-running land disputes, killing at least 30 people in their latest assault, police said Wednesday.

The attack in Benue state comes as a bomb exploded Wednesday in northeast Nigeria, apparently killing a police officer and sparking reprisal attacks by the military in the region, residents said.

In Benue state, the attack Sunday targeted a rural village of Christian Tiv people called Yogbo in the state, police spokesman Daniel Ezeala said. After the attack, those living there fled, community leader Daniel Tsenghul said.

The Tiv are one the largest of the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, a nation of more than 160 million people and more than 250 different ethnicities.

The Tiv and the Hausa-Fulani herdsman have previously fought over land in Benue. In December, authorities said fighting between the two groups displaced some 5,000 people.

Meanwhile, a bomb detonated Wednesday morning in Potiskum, Yobe state, which targeted soldiers in the city trying to fight the radical Islamist sect known as Boko Haram. Security forces later cordoned off large portions of the city and began a door-to-door search, state police commissioner Patrick Egbuniwe said. Residents there said they heard gunshots throughout the day as soldiers raided civilian homes. At least four homes were set ablaze by soldiers, the residents said.

No group immediately claimed the bombing, though it likely was carried out by Boko Haram, which has been waging an increasingly bloody guerrilla fight with Nigeria's weak central government. The sect is blamed for killing more than 690 people this year alone, according to an Associated Press count. It wants the government to release its imprisoned followers and to impose strict Shariah law across Nigeria, a country largely split between a Muslim north and a Christian south.

Islamists bomb three churches in Kaduna State

Blasts in two churches in Zaria, one in Kaduna city kill dozens of Christians

By Abdias Pasoville

Compass Direct News (17.06.2012) – Suspected Islamic extremists bombed three churches in Kaduna state this morning, the third consecutive Sunday that worship services in Nigeria have ended in lethal bloodshed.

In a predominantly Christian area of Zaria known as Wusasa, a suspected Islamic extremist crashed a car into a barricade at an Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) church at around 9 a.m., setting off explosives that killed at least 24 people and wounded 125, according to one unconfirmed report citing an anonymous state official. A few minutes later, suspected Islamic extremists set off explosives at Christ the King Catholic Church in the Sabon Gari area of Zaria.

An eyewitness told Compass that at least 10 corpses were removed from the cathedral, with dozens of people injured, many critically. At press time the Nigerian Red Cross Society reported the death toll from the blast at the Catholic church had reached 16.

A short while later, a Pentecostal congregation called Shalom Church in the Trikania area of Kaduna city was bombed, killing at least 10, according to the Red Cross. Retaliatory attacks reportedly killed several others.

The attacks were believed to have been carried out by the Boko Haram Islamic sect, which took responsibility for similar attacks in Plateau and Borno states on June 10 and in Bauchi state on June 3.

Andrew Gani-Ikilami, executive director of the Wusasa Business School in Zaria, said many victims were arriving at the area hospital.

"One of the churches is an ECWA church located here in Wusasa where we are, and many children are affected," he said.

Dr. Taylor Adeyemi, medical director at St. Luke's (Anglican) Hospital Wusasa in Zaria, confirmed that many of the victims were children.

"40 injured Christians have been brought to the hospital, and the majority of them are children," Adeyemi said. "Three have died, and others are still being treated."

John Shiklam, a journalist in Kaduna city, said a 24-hour-curfew made it difficult to obtain more information on the blast there.

"All I can say is that it is true there were attacks on three churches in the state, and as a result, a fight broke out between Muslims and Christians," Shiklam told Compass by phone.

Besides the bombing of a church in Jos, Plateau state last Sunday, gunmen also attacked a church in the town of Biu in Borno state, killing two Christians.

On June 3 in Bauchi state, a Muslim suicide bomber from the Boko Haram sect attacked the Living Faith church in Yelwa, a Christian settlement on the outskirts of the northern Nigerian city of Bauchi, killing 13, with allegations following that authorities killed eight others who were protesting the lack of security. The blast also collapsed a wall of the nearby Harvest Field Church of Christ, leaving three people in critical condition.

Boko Haram has killed at least 560 people this year alone, according to a county by The Associated Press. Literally meaning "Forbidden Book" and translated as "Western education is forbidden," the Islamist sect has targeted churches, state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria.

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 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.

Suicide bombing hits another church in Jos

Boko Haram Islamic extremist finds weak link in military security chain

By Abdias Pasoville

Compass Direct News (10.06.2012) – An Islamic extremist ran a car full of explosives at a Pentecostal church in this Plateau state city this morning, killing at least two Christians and injuring more than 40 others, military and police officials said.

In Borno state also today, gunmen reportedly killed at least two Christians during church worship. The Boko Haram Islamic sect reportedly took responsibility for both assaults.

The attack in Jos on Christ's Chosen Church of God was the second suicide bombing of a church in two Sundays and the third church bombing in Jos in six months. The explosion, which hit after a service had ended and church leaders and some children remained in the building, collapsed the roof of the sanctuary, witnesses said. The death toll was expected to increase as injuries were severe.

It marked the second consecutive Sunday that an extremist from the Boko Haram Islamist sect has been able to get through check-points to bomb a church, and reports followed of rioting by aggrieved youths that left further casualties.

Esther Solomon, a 31-year-old university student whose family's house sits directly opposite the church building, told Compass that a pastor, church elders and some children remained in the sanctuary at the time moment the bomb was detonated. She said she was in her family living room at the time.

"I heard this loud explosion that broke window glass. The impacts of the explosion forcefully opened the front door of our house and threw me into one of the bedrooms," Solomon said. "I just found myself in the bedroom, and when I rushed out, I found out that a suicide bomber had crashed into the church across the road."

Rahab Gunat, 41, said the suicide bomber was seen trying first to bomb two churches, St. Peter's Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), each like Chosen church located along Rukuba Road, but could not gain entry. The bomber then targeted Christ's Chosen Church of God, though officials said he was stopped short of the building before detonating the explosives.

"He was seen trying to go to the ECWA church, but he was prevented from doing so by members of the Boys Brigade [similar to Boy Scouts] who were keeping watch over the church," Gunat said. "From there, he went to the St. Peter's Catholic Church, but was denied entry too, but when he found that there was no security in this church, he crashed into it."

Celina Malo, 20, whose family's house is just a few meters from the collapsed church building, told Compass that she was preparing for a bath when the bomb exploded.

"I heard a loud explosion that brought down the ceiling of our house, shattered all glass of our windows and violently brought down household items," she said. "I was confused and began crying."

Her two younger sisters, ages 8 and 11, were also crying, she said.

"I rushed outside to see what had happened and saw that it was a car that had crashed into a nearby church, and people inside were crying," Malo told Compass.

She said that when she rushed out of her house, she saw the daughter of the pastor of the Christ's Chosen Church of God crying outside the demolished structure.

"Her name is Victory, and she told me that her dad, the pastor of the church, and her mom, were both inside the church," Malo said. "As we were thinking of what to do, people around rushed here to rescue people trapped in the church. Many have been injured, and they have been taken to the hospital."

Malo added that she assisted in moving the 10-year-old son of the church pastor, Peter, away from the bombed church before he was taken to a hospital.

"The boy was bleeding from wounds he got in the explosion," Malo said.

The News Agency of Nigeria reported that the church pastor, Monday Uzoka, and a church elder were in critical condition following the blast.

Malo's mother, who was out of the town at the time of the bombing, arrived as Malo spoke with Compass and began to cry upon seeing her daughters.

"I am happy my children are alive," she explained. "I praise God that I met them alive."

The injured were being treated at Bingham University Teaching Hospital, Jos University Teaching Hospital and the Plateau State Specialist Hospital, all in Jos.

In Biu, Borno state, gunmen reportedly shot at worshippers as they were leaving a worship service before entering the sanctuary and killing two Christians. The Borno state police commissioner reportedly confirmed the attack on the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN in the local Hausa language) congregation.

On June 3 in Bauchi state, a Muslim suicide bomber from the Boko Haram sect attacked the Living Faith church in Yelwa, a Christian settlement on the outskirts of the northern Nigerian city of Bauchi, killing 13, with allegations following that authorities killed eight others who were protesting the lack of security. The blast also collapsed a wall of the nearby Harvest Field Church of Christ, leaving three people in critical condition.

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Injuries severe after Bauchi, Nigeria Suicide Bomb Attack

Islamic extremist bombing, alleged military shooting, kill 21

By Abdias Pasoville

Compass Direct News (07.06.2012) – Amid allegations that soldiers were responsible for at least eight of 21 deaths after the suicide bombing of two churches here on Sunday (June 3), sources told Compass that most of those injured from the blast and alleged military shooting were in critical condition.

A statement reportedly from the Muslim extremist Boko Haram sect claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing of the Living Faith church in Yelwa, a Christian settlement on the outskirts of the northern Nigerian city of Bauchi. The blast also collapsed a wall of the nearby Harvest Field Church of Christ, leaving three people in critical condition.

Of 61 people taken to Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital Bauchi after the blast, 38 were in critical condition, a staff member told Compass on condition of anonymity; the other 23 have been treated and sent home. Church leaders said at a press conference on Monday (June 4) that 45 Christians were considered injured.

"Twenty-five out of these were injured by the bomb blast, while 20 sustained various degrees of injuries from the gunshots by soldiers," said the Rev. Lawi Pokti, chairman of the Bauchi chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, who said the military shot eight Christians to death.

The Nigerian military has yet to respond to the allegations. In similar church attacks in Nigeria, Christians angry that their brethren were being killed in the presence of security agencies have been shot for refusing military orders to leave.

Lamenting that Christians have been attacked and killed without provocation, still Pokti beseeched Christians to refrain from seeking revenge.

"We also wish to call on all Christians to remain calm and not to embark on any act of reprisal or vengeance, as this will constitute a criminal act and a violation of the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," he said.

Johnson Elogva, associate pastor at Living Faith, said most of the injuries were severe.

"Most of our members are critically ill in the hospitals," he said. "Some with first degree, second degree burns."

Elogva said many of the church's 2,000 members were traumatized, but that the battle belonged to the Lord.

"Like the Lord told Jehoshaphat not to go out and fight, so we too believe that the Lord will fight for us," he said. "These terrorists believe in chariots, but we trust in the Lord."

The pastor had completed the first worship service at 9:15 a.m. and had begun the second service when the congregation heard a loud blast that shook the sanctuary, he said.

"The glass windows were shattered, the roof of the church building was shaking and almost collapsing on us," he said. "Our church members were scattered, and they were running and jumping through all available entrances out of the sanctuary. There was smoke and fire all over outside."

Mbami Godiya, pastor of nearby Harvest Field Church of Christ, said 10 members of his congregation were injured – three critically – when the blast collapsed a wall of his church building.

He saw two cars being screened at the security point in front of the church compound, the second one containing the suicide bomber, when he turned his attention away from them, he said.

"Suddenly, there was a loud bang which brought part of my church building down," Godiya said. "Our church became very dark as fire engulfed it. In the midst of this darkness and the cries from the members of my church, I shouted and called for calm, and asking them to lie down in case there were multiple explosions."

The pastor said he saw the hand of God in that no one from his congregation died.

"Ten of my members who were injured were taken to the hospital," he said. "Seven were treated and discharged, and three are still in critical condition."

Most of the people from Living Faith who died had ended their morning worship service and were leaving the building, he said.

"They were all passing by the security check-point by my church when the explosion occurred," Godiya said.

The government had sent security agents to keep watch over the churches based on threats to the area, but Godiya faulted the government approach.

"They should have mounted security check-points far away from the churches, but they came and mounted such check-points close to our churches, and that was the reason the bombers were able to get close," he said.

Literally meaning "Forbidden Book" and translated as "Western education is forbidden," Boko Haram has targeted churches, state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria.

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Funeral

Five victims of the bombing were buried yesterday (June 6), amid weeping and wailing.

Buried at Christian Cemetery in Yelwa at 12:30 p.m. were Irimiya Hassan Dodo, 67; Joseph Kehinde Aiyedipe, 30, a student of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi; Samuel Olusegun, 16, student of the Divine International School, Bauchi; Augustine Effiong Ita, 32, an adolescent health specialist; and Suru Gbamgboshe, a final year student of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi.

Gauis Biyal, pastor of Living Faith church, urged mourners at the service not to seek revenge against those who think they are fighting for God by killing Christians.

"Vengeance belongs to the Lord; vengeance belongs to Jesus Christ who was persecuted for our sake," Biyal said. "It is He that can fight on our behalf. He knows what to do. If we try to do it ourselves, we will die in the process."

Two churches targeted in Bauchi State

CSW (040.06.2012) - At least 18 people died and 32 were wounded yesterday in a suicide bomb attack by Boko Haram that targeted two churches in Bauchi State, north east Nigeria.

The bombing reportedly occurred just as the congregation of Living Faith Church in Yelwa Tudu, Bauchi city was leaving the service. However, the casualties came primarily from the neighbouring church, Harvest Field Church for Christ, which bore the brunt of the

explosion. Twelve cars and a number of buildings were also reported to have been destroyed by the blast.

Local sources report that rumours of imminent bombings by Boko Haram had circulated over the weekend, and that while security in the area was initially reinforced, it had been relaxed prior to the bombing.

Three other bombers carrying explosives were reportedly intercepted on their way to the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) and Catholic churches in Yelwa Tudu, but were killed by angry crowds that gathered there.

In a separate development, reports emerged on Saturday of a night attack by armed Fulani tribesmen on Sansun Village in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area (LGA), Southern Kaduna State, in which a man named Matthew Aetung and his son were hacked to death, his wife was critically injured, and his home was razed to the ground.

Mervyn Thomas, chief executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "Once again we have witnessed terror attacks on innocent civilians who were peaceably expressing their faith, while a family was murdered in their home by armed assailants. CSW extends our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who died in each of these terrible attacks, and reiterates the call for a decisive, intelligence-led strategy to combat the insurgency, and for comprehensive protection of areas that are known to be under threat of ethno-religious violence."

Bomber strikes Nigerian Church, as attacks on Christians Mount

Reuters (03.06.2012) - A suicide bomber set off a car full of explosives at a church in northern Nigeria on Sunday, killing at least 12 people in the latest attack on Christian worshippers, witnesses said.

Security officers at a roadblock nearby said the bomber forced his car through the checkpoint and drove into the church in Yelwa in the state of Kebbi.

"I had just left after the morning service and was out of the church when I heard a loud explosion," said Aliku Jon, a mechanic. "I rushed back and there were dozens of people lying in pools of blood. Many were injured, including two police officers."

It was not clear who was responsible for the attack, although churches have been singled out this year by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram, which has increasingly used suicide bombers.

Boko Haram has been blamed for hundreds of killings in bombings or gun attacks over the past two years. It says it is fighting to reinstate an ancient Islamic caliphate in northern Nigeria that would impose stricter Shariah law.

It has become the chief security threat in Nigeria, Africa's top oil producer, and has linked up with other Islamist groups in the region like Al Qaeda's North African wing. But its sphere of influence is far from oil-producing facilities in southern Nigeria.

The sect had been less active in recent weeks, as a security crackdown in the north led to the deaths and arrests of several commanders.

Sect claims Nigeria bomb attack that killed 15

Associated Press (June 4, 2012) - A radical Islamist sect has claimed responsibility for a suicide car bombing at a north Nigeria church that killed at least 15 people.

In a statement sent to journalists Monday, a spokesman for the sect known as Boko Haram claimed Sunday's attack in the city of Bauchi, the capital of Bauchi state.

The statement also again threatened journalists in Nigeria over what the statement described biased stories about the sect's actions.

Sunday's bombing wounded dozens of people, as the car bomb detonated as worshippers left an early morning church service.

Boko Haram is waging an increasingly bloody sectarian fight with Nigeria's weak central government. The sect is blamed for killing more than 550 people this year alone, according to an Associated Press count.

Violence continues in Nigeria as Akinola criticizes President

"Compass Direct News," (30.05.2012) - In Nigeria's Plateau state, Christian leaders said more Christians have died at the hands of Muslim extremists than the 35 that the military reported thus far in May.

A Compass reporter was among a group of journalists that came under attack from Islamic extremists this month. In three local government areas in Plateau state, armed Fulani herdsmen attacked 15 Christian villages, killing and maiming Christians, destroying homes and leaving more than 1,000 villagers displaced, sources said.

The villages - Jwol, Foron, Tahoss, Bangai, Sopp, Werem, Danjol, Rinyam, Rim, Kak, Gwamrim, Gwom, Fang, Lwa and Riyas - are located in the local government areas of Barkin Ladi, Bokkos, and Riyom.

Villagers said the attackers were Muslim Fulani herdsmen likely supplied and instigated by Islamic extremist groups. Sources told Compass that Muslim gunmen invaded Rinyam village on May 9 at about 12:30 a.m. and shot seven Christians in their homes, though increasingly assailants are using only machetes and knives to avoid notice by soldiers charged with keeping order.

"Seven people were shot dead, including two children," said Daniel Dem, an area legislator in the Plateau State House of Assembly. "Three were severely injured. They are now receiving medical attention at the Vom Christian Hospital."

In Rim village, Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed one Christian, Bulus Dakumbi, and injured two others, now receiving treatment at Vom Christian Hospital.

At Gwarim village, Muslim gunmen killed five Christians: Dinnatu Danbwarang, 48; Simi Joseph, 26; Rose Dalyop, 25; Jafates Samuel, 4; and Christiana Samuel, 7.

At Wereng village near Kuru Station, three members of a Christian family were killed when Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked the village: Philip Francis Pam, 37; his wife Simi Francis, 28; and their only daughter, who was a few months old. Christian residents told Compass that the Muslim killers entered the family's bedroom at 10 p.m. as they slept and murdered them.

The victims had gunshot wounds on their chests and stomachs as well as machete cuts on their necks, neighbors said. The baby had machete cuts on her ribs, and her fingers were cut off.

"Attacks have been happening in this neighborhood, and this is always the mode of operation – gunshots and machete cuts," said a relative, Francis Pam.

Dauda Gyang, a Christian villager in Gwarim village, said his younger brother was killed when armed Muslims attacked his village over a period of two weeks.

"Muslim Fulani herdsmen came in large numbers and attacked us," he said. "Their method of attack is that they will start shooting from a distance to scare the villagers, and as soon as the villagers run out of fear, they will come and set our houses ablaze. From my village alone they burned more than 10 houses."

Sunday Madaki, a displaced Christian from Gwarim, said 13 people were killed and more than 20 injured in six villages.

"Over 30 residential houses have been burned," Madaki said. "All displaced Christians have no homes to return to."

In Riyas in the Bokokos Local Government Area, about 15 armed Muslims attacked the village, killing two Christians, 35-year-old Mangut Dakwan, and 28-year-old Magit Manaseh, before destroying their homes.

"Armed men suspected to be Muslim Fulani herdsmen invaded Riyas village at midnight," Titus Ayuba Alams, a legislator in the Plateau State House of Assembly, told Compass.

In Fang village, the extremists killed a Christian farmer named Dantyang Bauchi, while Ana Christopher Gyang, a mother of seven, was killed at Lwa village.

Three other Christians were killed in an attack at Jwol and Foron villages, where the assailants set fire to houses and shot at Christians as they fled, residents said.

"These armed Muslim men set fire on surrounding bushes in Jwol, and when we came out to put out the fire, these Muslims shot at us, killing two of our relatives," said one area resident. "One of us, Dung Danjuma, is still missing even as I am talking to you now."

He added that another person was also killed in Foron in a separate attack.

At Rinyam-Tahoss village, Muslim gunmen killed seven Christians, including two children. Three Christians injured in the attack were receiving treatment at the Vom Christian Hospital, sources said.

Capt. Markus Mdahyelya, spokesman for the Special Task Force (STF) charged with keeping order in areas under national emergency, confirmed the attacks, as did Samuel Dabai, a spokesman for area police.

Mdahyelya said that as a result of the attacks, the STF commander had shifted troops from other places as reinforcements to the area.

"The commander himself has visited the area and addressed the refugees," he said. "He asked them to return to their houses with promise of adequate security. So, we are in control in the area."

Displaced Christians have taken refuge at police stations and primary schools in other parts of the state, while others have fled to Jema'a and Sanga Local Government Areas of Kaduna state. In Rinyam-Tahoss village, for example, no fewer than 200 displaced Christians, mostly women and children, are living in a public primary school with no food or medication.

Journalists Attacked

Emmanuel Jugul, a former legislator from the affected areas, told Compass that the government is doing nothing to protect the lives and property of Christians.

"The security agencies in charge of the area are not sincere," Jugul said. "Either they are not doing their job, or they are conspiring with the attackers, because they've not done anything to stop the killings, and yet the areas being attacked by these Muslims are under state of emergency."

A Compass correspondent was among a group of journalists, along with assemblyman Dem, present in Kak when Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked the village for the second time that week. They shot at the group, but everyone escaped unhurt.

"I have witnessed the killings of my people, and I've had a close shave with death," Dem said, in tears. "You journalists have seen it yourselves that my people are not telling lies. And that my people are living in danger. There is no security for Christians here."

Akinola v. Jonathan

The Nigerian president on Sunday (May 27) took pointed criticism for the government's handling of Muslim extremist violence against Christians.

At a special worship service in Abuja for Democracy Day with President Goodluck Jonathan in attendance, the former Anglican primate of the Church of Nigeria criticized the government's approach to the Muslim extremist Boko Haram sect. The Rt. Rev. Peter Akinola told those gathered at the interdenominational service at the National Christian Centre that, contrary to assertions that Boko Haram is tantamount to a social revolution against economic injustice, officials should ignore claims that the sect is motivated by anything more than jihadist desire to do away with Christianity.

The 68-year-old Akinola advised the Nigerian government against dialogue with Boko Haram.

"They want to eliminate 'infidels,' which includes you, Mr. President," Akinola said. "You open yourself to ridicule if you open dialogue to a group that has made the country ungovernable. Don't treat them with kid gloves. You don't dialogue with criminals."

Boko Haram (literally, "Forbidden Book," translated as "Western education is forbidden"), has targeted state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of sharia (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria.

Asserting that the government has failed to address 30 Islamist campaigns to rid the country of Christianity, Akinola said Boko Haram will not be easily stopped, as it has financial and logistical support outside and within Nigeria.

"Boko Haram must be seen in the right context – it is a continuation of the past," Akinola said. "Shun all political claims that Boko Haram is not against Christianity. It is. It has been going on since 1966. They are committed to jihad. You can't stop them; it is their religious obligation. They have been doing it for 36 years; they have not stopped and they won't stop."

He said that attacks on Christians are a clear indication that the country was in disunity, describing Boko Haram as a "blood-thirsty Islamic sect with no regard for the sanctity of human lives. Nigeria is at war against itself."

Speaking later, Jonathan acknowledged that Boko Haram took his administration by surprise but maintained that his government was doing everything possible to keep it in check. He asserted that the country will remain indivisible.

"No individual or group, no matter their ambition or selfish purpose, will be able to divide this nation," Jonathan said. "Nigeria will never disintegrate. Even though some people were busy predicting the disintegration of Nigeria, there would be no such thing."

The president said he has directed security agencies to launch a complete war against Boko Haram.

"We have done a lot and committed resources to advance our security architecture in order to tackle terrorism, and, God willing, we shall overcome," he said. "My request is for you to stand by me."

Islamic terrorist bases raided in Nigerian Cities of Jos, Kano

Military responds to attacks by Boko Haram extremists on churches, other sites

By Abdias Passoville

Compass Direct News (21.05.2012) – The Nigerian military's discovery here of a Muslim terrorist base full of ammunition and explosives on Saturday (May 19) refutes Islamist claims that Christians have been bombing their own churches, a local pastor said.

Following an intensive three-day search by Nigeria's Special Military Task Force that found four Improvised Explosive Devices – along with one that detonated without casualties – the pastor of a church less than two kilometers away said God has vindicated area Christians.

"It's a vindication, as in the past Muslims, after attacking Christian churches, have claimed that Christians have been responsible for these bombings," said the pastor, whose name is withheld for security reasons. "But now, everyone knows that Boko Haram has carried out the attacks and bombings on Christians and our churches in collaboration with other local Muslims in Jos."

One person was killed and nine others were injured on April 24 after suspected Islamic extremists attacked a TV viewing center in a Christian area of Jos where a crowd had

gathered to watch soccer. On March 11, Islamic extremists reportedly from the Boko Haram Islamist sect bombed a Catholic church in Jos, killing 10 Christians, including two boys ages 8 and 16.

A military spokesman said the Jos enclave, uncovered after an intensive three-day search, belonged to Boko Haram. Spokesman Markus Mdahyelya said in a press statement that soldiers also found 19 explosive devices, eight bags of Urea Nitrate Fertilizer, wire, four containers of sodium oxide, one of potassium chloride, three of lead nitrate, two of Aluminium Metal Powder, a remote control and white sulphur, besides two generators and sniper ammunition.

"During the search, one Improvised Explosive Device detonated, but nobody was injured," he said.

Six women, including Hauwa Muhammed, widow of the suicide bomber of *This Day* newspaper in Abuja, were arrested in the house in the Rikkos area of Jos. The April 26 attack on *This Day* newspaper killed three persons, including the suicide bomber, and injured 13 others, including a 12-year-old child.

Before the raid in Jos, a Boko Haram leader had left the previous day, leaving behind his wife and five children, along with five other women and six other children, all taken into custody. Muhammed reportedly said she and her husband had moved to Jos from Damaturu, Yobe state, to live with the Boko Haram leader.

She said her husband had traveled with the Boko Haram leader, identified only as Malam, in late April to an unknown destination, and that a few days later only Malam returned, telling her that her husband had died in an accident.

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 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*.

Kano Carnage

In northern Nigeria's Kano state, Nigerian forces killed a suspected Islamist militant in a raid on May 1 following Boko Haram's April 29 attack on worship at Bayero University, where 19 people reportedly died from bomb blast and gunfire.

The Islamic extremists attacked two university halls, one for St. Stephen's Catholic students and one for evangelicals. Two of those killed in the attacks were professors.

A Catholic church held a memorial service on May 11 for the 10 Catholics slain at the university, declaring them "martyrs of the Christian faith."

The Rt. Rev. John Namaza Niyiring, bishop of Kano Diocese of the Catholic Church, conducted the memorial service at Our Lady of Fatima Cathedral, encouraging those in attendance to maintain a strong faith.

"The activities of those persecuting the church of God should not weaken our resolve to remain faithful to Christ, but should make us strong in spite of the present challenges," he said. "Do not allow persecution to rob you of your faith as Christians in these times of trouble. You must be more prayerful and seek the protection of God, instead of living in fear."

The Rev. Emefiena Ezeani, who had just finished conducting mass at his parish when he heard about the attack at the university, told Compass that too many people are refusing to acknowledge that churches are as much primary targets of Boko Haram as police, government and media facilities.

“Do Christians in Nigeria not think that the Muslim north, or at least a group of northern Muslims, have declared jihad against Christianity in Nigeria?” he said. “Has Boko Haram, thanks to their being truthful, not made it unequivocally clear that their ultimate intention is to Islamize the whole of Nigeria? I am worried by the disturbing and deafening silence.”

Maiduguri Assault

Boko Haram (literally, “Forbidden Book,” translated as “Western education is forbidden”), has targeted state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria.

In an attack in Maiduguri, in the northeastern state of Borno, that authorities said was related to the Kano assault as it took place on the same day (April 29), suspected Boko Haram militants reportedly charged into a Church of Christ in Nigeria service and began firing as the congregation was about to take communion.

Witnesses reportedly said that when congregation members who escaped later returned, they found the pastor dead along with four other slain worshippers.

Bombers attack center in Christian area of JOS

Compass Direct News (25.04.2012) – One person was killed and nine others were injured last night after suspected Islamic extremists attacked a TV viewing center in a Christian area of Jos where a crowd had gathered to watch soccer. At about 10:15 p.m. at the viewing center, one of many such establishments popular in Nigeria for watching soccer matches, attackers drove past the site and threw an explosive device at hundreds of Christians watching the match, eyewitnesses told Compass. Medical personnel at nearby Janvak Hospital were treating four of the injured under strict supervision of police and other security agents. The bombing marks the second time in two weeks that the Christian area has been attacked. During Easter celebrations, Islamic extremists were also suspected of detonating a bomb a few meters from the center that injured five Christians. Various churches in the Tudun Wada area of Jos commonly use the site as a base for evangelistic campaigns aimed at social venues in the area. Christian and Muslim communities live in close but separate quarters of the Tudun Wada area of Jos, and the attacks have heightened tensions between them. The area comprises eight churches.

Suicide bomber targets churches in Kaduna

Repelled by church security, suspected Islamic extremist detonates blast at nearby taxi stand

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (09.04.2012) / HRWF (11.04.2012) – www.hrwf.net – Churches celebrating Easter services were the targets of a suicide bomber who killed at least 38 people yesterday in Kaduna city in northern Nigeria, sources said.

Security personnel at one of the church buildings blocked the bomber, believed to belong to the Boko Haram Islamic sect, who then decided to detonate his explosives in the street at a nearby motorcycle taxi center, the sources said. Dozens of people were injured in addition to those killed.

The bombs damaged the buildings of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Good News church and the All Nations Christian Assembly, besides blasting off roofs from homes and hotels and destroying vehicles. Located on the same street, Gwari Road, are the Redeemed Christian Church of God and an Assemblies of God church.

Luka Binniyat, a Christian resident of the city, told Compass that law enforcement agents believed the ECWA Good News church was the primary target.

“Richard Markus, a detective, mentioned that the bomber’s main target was the ECWA Good News church a few meters from the scene of the bomb blast,” Binniyat said.

Binniyat said that he saw the explosion at about 9:30 a.m., and shortly afterwards spoke with Markus.

“The bomber, described as dark, lean-looking and in his mid-30s, approached the ECWA Good News church at around 9:30 a.m., a plainclothes policeman informed us on Gwari road beside a roadblock set up to safeguard the church about 100 meters from its entrance,” Binniyat said.

Markus described the suicide bomber as wearing shorts and a T-shirt; he said he had an army uniform in the back of the Honda Academy car he was driving, according to Binniyat.

“He tried forcing his way past, but the security man stood in between him and the blockade,” Binniyat said. “He even pushed him a ways before some policemen manning the gate of the church rushed down to the scene.”

According to Binniyat, Markus said, “When we saw the uniform, I told him that he was a disgrace to the force. I said he should have been here to help with security instead of trying to be such a nuisance. Anyway, the police, fully armed, told him to move away. He drove away in a reckless manner.

“As we were regretting not searching his car, in about four to five minutes, we heard an earth-shaking explosion. The car that exploded was the same car that wanted to enter here.”

Residents of Kaduna who witnessed the attack told Compass some of the church buildings were affected. John Shiklam, a Kaduna-based Christian journalist, said the explosion shattered windows of church buildings and nearby establishments.

“A suicide bomber attempted to bomb the ECWA church and the All Nations Christian Assembly, both located at Gwari Road by Junction Road, but security agents repelled him,” Shiklam said. “However, on his way out the bomb exploded at Junction Road, near the Stadium Roundabout, killing the bomber and damaging some commercial vehicles at the junction.”

Blessing Audu, who witnessed the explosion, confirmed that parts of the Assemblies of God church building were also damaged.

Emergency rescue workers from the National Emergency Management Authority and the Red Cross removed bodies and evacuated the injured to four hospitals in Kaduna and Zaria. At St. Gerard's Hospital, staff members told Compass that they had received five bodies and 10 wounded persons. Other hospitals receiving corpses and treating the wounded were Barau Dikko Hospital, Military Hospital and the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital.

Boko Haram (literally "Forbidden Book," translated as "Western education is forbidden") has targeted state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of sharia (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria, but Kaduna resident Stanley Yakubu said that Christians are one of its main targets.

"The truth is that there is a deliberate effort to silence or eliminate the Christians in the north," he said. "Otherwise, why have churches suddenly become the target of suicide bombers? Are there no mosques and Islamic centers in the north? Let the world accept the fact that there is no 'Boko Haram,' but 'Christianity Haram.'"

Another resident, Malachy Gwatyap, told Compass that attacks on Christians must stop. The bomber detonated the bomb in order to kill Christians disembarking from motorcycle taxis heading to their churches, he said.

"It appears from this heinous incident that Boko Haram is changing tactics – if they can't get Christians in the churches, it would still serve their purpose to get them either on their way to or from church," he said. "Shall we continue to suffer in silence? Shall we continue to be the sacrificial lambs on the altar of bigotry of these Islamists? We have suffered enough."

Lao officials confiscate church buildings

Separately, northern officials order Christians to give up faith or be expelled

By Sarah Page

Compass Direct News (06.04.2012) / HRWF (10.04.2012) - www.hrwf.net - Lao officials on Thursday (April 5) confiscated and sealed a church building in southern Laos after holding a two-day seminar warning against religious belief, according to advocacy group Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF).

Besides sealing the church building in Khamnongsung village, Saybuly district, they also warned that other unrecognized churches in the district in Savannakhet Province would soon be shut down.

Local Communist Party official Saysamorn, along with Saysana, district deputy chief of police, and Bountha, district head of religious affairs, ordered all villages to attend the seminar, held from Tuesday through Thursday (April 3 to 5) and entitled "Tricks of the Enemy."

According to villagers present at the seminar, the officials declared that Westerners, particularly those from the United States, were using the Christian faith to destabilize the government. They then declared that the 745 Christians in the village could only meet in private homes, claiming that they did not have permission to construct the Khamnongsung church building - although it was erected in 1963, prior to the 1975 Communist takeover of Laos.

"How do these officials know that Khamnongsung did not follow proper procedures back in 1968?" HRWLRF asked in a press release issued today. "And if a permit is required for this building, why wait 49 years to tell them?"

The officials also declared that only one church in the district, located in Dongpoong village, was officially recognized and that all others would soon be shut down, HRWLRF reported.

There are a total of 30 church buildings scattered throughout Savannakhet Province - but only seven are approved by the government.

Christians Protest

On Sunday (April 1), members of two other Lao churches in Saybuly district met for worship in buildings that were earlier confiscated by authorities, according to HRWLRF.

Authorities confiscated the 37-year-old Kengweng village church building on Feb. 22 and another belonging to a church in Dongpaiwan village on Sept. 22. At 7 a.m. on Sunday (April 1), Kengweng church members removed the padlock from the door of their building, entered and worshipped there. Members of Dongpaiwan did not enter their building but assembled outside it, HRWLRF reported.

The congregations met as a protest against the continued lack of access to worship facilities, a spokesman from HRWLRF told Compass.

Another church in Nadeng village was confiscated on Dec. 4, but members have not yet dared to meet in or go near the building.

Saysamorn, Saysana and Bountha also traveled to Kengweng on Feb. 21 and conducted a compulsory two-day seminar for villagers, urging them not to adopt or follow foreign religions, according to HRWLRF. At the close of the seminar on Feb. 22, they confiscated and sealed the village church building and ordered the 178 Christian not to hold services there.

Church members were instructed to submit a formal written request to village, district and provincial level officials if they wished to use the building again, according to a local church member who preferred to remain unnamed.

On Sept. 14, some 20 Saybuly district officials, military and police personnel seized Dongpaiwan village church and tore down a cross on the building on grounds that church members, numbering around 200, had not obtained prior approval for construction. (See www.compassdirect.org, "Lao Officials Seize Church Building, Convert it into School," Sept. 26, 2011.)

The villagers argued that while permission was necessary, the local government routinely denied new applications for the construction of churches, thereby creating an impossible situation and denying them the right to worship freely as guaranteed in the constitution.

Officials then converted the church into a school for fifth graders, moving chairs and desks into the building and posting a military guard on the property to prevent Christians from returning there.

Trouble in the North

In northern Laos, Officials in Luang Namtha and Luang Prabang provinces recently ordered Christians in several villages to renounce their faith or face expulsion, according to HRWLRF reports.

On March 2, some 20 officials including district police officers, Communist Party members

and village security forces, summoned pastor Khamla of Dongvieng village, Viengphuka district in Luang Namtha Province, and sharply rebuked him for believing in Christianity. After interrogation, officials ordered Khamla to give up his faith within five days or "be cast out of the village."

Khamla was the only known Christian in a district with a population of 20,000.

On Feb. 18, the chief of Hueygong village in Pakoo district of Luang Prabang Province ordered 10 Christian families in the village, a total of 65 people, to give up their faith or face expulsion. The Christians, most of whom became Christians only three months prior to the eviction order, were meeting for worship in the home of church leader Yar Yang.

Before the order was given, Pakoo district officials told Christians in the district to report the number of church members and churches and apply for official permission to adopt the Christian faith. A leader of one of eight house churches in Pakoo explained to HRWLRP that the district chief, the religious affairs office and the local secretary of the Communist Party had to give their approval before Christians could openly confess faith and worship God.

When Christians failed to comply with these orders, officials gave them a month to recant their faith or face expulsion.

Before the expulsion could take place, however, Bousee Chantuma, head of religious affairs in Luang Prabang, reportedly told Pakoo officials that they must reverse the expulsion order as they had no legal grounds to issue it, and threatened to take the matter to provincial and central religious affairs offices. He also warned them that Christians in the district could not be arrested without his permission, according to HRWLRP.

Earlier, on Jan. 13, authorities in Hueysell village, Ngoi district of Luang Prabang Province, summoned two Christian leaders and ordered them and their congregation of about 80 people to abandon their faith or be expelled.

To date the Christians have held firm to their faith, and authorities have yet to follow through on the eviction order.

Parents torn over loss of daughter in Nigeria

Catholic troubled by Muslim college instructor disappears in volatile northeast

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (22.03.12) – Nearly seven months after their 24-year-old daughter disappeared during a wave of Islamic extremist violence here, Helen and Dakim Gyang Bot can only assume that the voice on the other end of her cell phone that told them "we have killed her" was telling the truth.

The body of Simi Maltida Kim has not been found, and those who answered the active Catholic's cell phone shortly after she disappeared on Sept. 1, 2011 did not indicate why they killed her. But there are signs that she was one of the hundreds of victims of Islamic extremist violence in northern Nigeria last year that has driven thousands of Christians to flee.

The Bots live in an undisclosed town near Jos, in Plateau state, but their daughter was a final-year student of Science Laboratory Technology at the Federal Polytechnic, in

northeastern Nigeria's Bauchi state. She had told them of an instructor there who humiliated her because of her Christian faith, they said.

"She told us that this Muslim teacher would summon her and then question her faith, or even bring in some Muslim students to confront her over her Christian faith," said her mother, Helen Bot. "When she told us this, we advised her to keep away from the Muslim teacher as much as possible."

The problem came to a head when the instructor failed her on a written exam without even looking at it, she said.

"This Muslim teacher did this to force our daughter into submitting to recanting her Christian faith, but this did not deter her from remaining firm as a Christian," Helen Bot said.

Kim retook the exam. Right after turning it in, again the Muslim teacher took her answer sheet and followed her out of the examination hall, telling her that he would never allow her to pass his course.

"The Muslim teacher tore her answer sheet in the presence of other students," Helen Bot said. "And, disturbed about this sad threat to her, Simi reported the matter to her school supervisor and the head of the Department of Science Laboratory Technology. She also phoned us to inform us about her plight in the school. We asked her to report the issue to appropriate authorities in the school and then return home."

Officials at the Federal Polytechnic in Bauchi declined to comment on the matter.

On Sept. 1, Simi told her friends in school that she was returning to the Jos area. Her mother phoned her that day and was surprised that she did not answer. She told Compass that it was the first time her daughter had never picked up the call.

"We communicated on the phone almost on a daily basis, and whenever I called her, even if she was sleeping, she would wake up and call me back," she said. "So it was unusual that day when I phoned her several times and she did not respond."

Dakim Gyang Bot, Kim's 59-year-old father, told Compass that when she did not return home the next day, the family was all the more anxious because news had filtered into town that Christians were being killed in Bauchi city.

"We phoned her, and instead, someone answered the phone," he said. "The voice was that of a male Muslim – we were able to know this from his accent; the man spoke to us in Hausa language, confirming our fears that he must be a Muslim. He refused to tell us where our daughter was."

The family immediately contacted two of her Christian friends in Bauchi, who searched for her without success, he said. They sent back word, however, that Muslim extremists had killed some Christians there on the day Kim was to leave for the Jos area.

"Her friends were told at the Bauchi motor park that some Christians who had got to the motor park on that day were killed by some militant Muslims," Bot said.

The family reported the disappearance to police and the State Security Service and continued to call her mobile phone, in hopes that someone would answer again. Someone did. This time, a female with a similar Hausa accent said, "Don't ever call this phone number again – we have killed her, so stop wasting your time looking for her," her father said.

The priest at the family's Catholic church told Compass that Kim might well have been killed by Muslim extremists in Bauchi.

"We learned that many Christians were killed in Bauchi at that time, so we are convinced that she must have been killed, too," he said.

He described Kim and her parents as faithful and prayerful.

"In fact, in the past six months, her parents have been on their knees praying for her even with the knowledge that she must have been killed by Muslim militants," he said.

Born Feb. 12, 1987, Kim was active in the Legion of Mary and the fellowship of Catholic students while at Bauchi Federal Polytechnic. A membership certificate from Christ the King Catholic Chaplaincy in Bauchi commends her as a distinguished member of the Catholic fellowship who was actively involved in the activities of the Legion of Mary.

Attacks on Christians in Bauchi state date back to 1958, but the recent incursion of Boko Haram has resulted in the killings of a dozen pastors and hundreds of Christians, sources said. Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro local government areas, which are mainly inhabited by Christians, have become the targets of attacks by Boko Haram sect members and Muslim Fulani herdsmen.

Boko Haram seeks to impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on Nigeria. The name Boko Haram translates loosely as "Western education is forbidden."

On Jan. 22, two church buildings were bombed by Boko Haram in Bauchi city. The two churches, Evangelical Church Winning All 2 and St. Theresa's Catholic Church, are located in the Fadaman Mada area near the town's railway station. On the same day, Boko Haram members attacked Tafawa Balewa town, killing six Christians.

Other major towns and local government areas where Christians have been attacked and their church buildings destroyed are Bauchi, Alkaleri, Toro, Bulkachuwa, Misau, Darazo, and Azare.

In October and November 2011, 25 Boko Haram sect members were arrested in a training camp in Bauchi, where they were preparing to attack Christians. Security agencies recovered 435 rounds of ammunitions, 26 pistols, a pump action machine gun, and many explosive devices from the Islamists.

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*.

Revenge attacks follow Nigeria church blast

Al Jazeera (12.03.12) - Anger is growing in central Nigeria after a spate of violent reprisal attacks have hit a number of towns in the aftermath of an attack on a church in the town of Jos.

News agencies reported on Monday a series of drive by shootings, including attacks on policemen in Nigeria's second largest city of Kano, as confidence in the country's security establishments continue to wane.

The violence comes after a suicide bombing of a Catholic church in Jos and retaliatory violence on Sunday left 14 people dead.

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan on Monday condemned Sunday's bombing at a Catholic church and reaffirmed his government's determination "to end the spate of mindless attacks and killings".

The bomb exploded as worshippers attended the final Mass of the day in Jos, a city where thousands have died in the last decade in religious and ethnic violence.

Security at the gate of the church's compound stopped the suspicious car and the bomber detonated his explosives during an altercation that followed, Pam Ayuba, Plateau state spokesman, said.

Several soldiers were also wounded in the blast.

The bombing sparked retaliatory violence in Jos later on Sunday, with angry youths burning down homes and soldiers guarding the city opening fire in neighbourhoods, witnesses said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility though the city has been targeted in the past by a radical Islamist group known as Boko Haram.

'Hallmark of Boko Haram'

Jos lies in the so-called middle belt region dividing the mainly Muslim north and predominantly Christian south, and hundreds of people have been killed in clashes in the city between Muslim and Christian ethnic groups in recent years.

Boko Haram claimed a series of bombings in Jos on Christmas Eve in 2010 that killed as many as 80 people.

The group also claimed a similar church bombing on February 26 on the main headquarters of the Church of Christ, which killed three people and wounded 38 others.

Al Jazeera's Yvonne Ndege, reporting from Lagos, said that the bombings have the hallmark of Boko Haram, though no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

"Bomb blasts are becoming a weekly occurrence in Nigeria and people in the affected states are feeling increasingly vulnerable," she said.

Violence blamed on Boko Haram has since 2009 has claimed more than 1,000 lives, including more than 300 this year, according to figures tallied by the AFP news agency and rights groups.

Police: Sect kills 7 people, including 3 policemen, in Nigeria's north

Associated Press (13.03.12) - Suspected members of the Boko Haram radical Islamist sect have killed seven people in two separate attacks in Nigeria's north, authorities said Tuesday.

Adamawa State police spokesman Daniel Altine said attackers shot dead a policeman, a soldier and three bystanders Monday evening at a checkpoint in the town of Mubi. The attackers may have been avenging the army's killing of six suspected Boko Haram members at a training camp in the town on Monday, Altine said.

Meanwhile, army spokesman Lt. Ikedichi Iweha said suspected sect members shot dead two more policemen in the major northern city of Kano on Tuesday. He said soldiers killed one of the assailants during the attack.

Boko Haram has been accused of killing more than 340 people in Nigeria this year alone. The group has engaged in an increasingly bloody campaign to destabilize Nigeria's weak central government.

Survivors desperately seek loved ones in Jos blast

Confirmed death toll rises to nine in Islamic extremist bombing at Catholic church

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (13.03.12) – One man rendered a widower by the Islamist suicide bombing at a Catholic church on Sunday (March 11) discovered his wife had been killed only after finding her severed hand with her wedding ring on it.

Another could identify his wife only by the clothing left on her remains.

Both women, 52-year-old Rose Dominic Dung Tari, and 50-year-old Roseline Kumbo Pam, had given birth to five children; the two victims were neighbors, their homes separated only by an apartment between them. They were two of the nine Christians confirmed killed – including two Boy Scouts, ages 8 and 16, helping security personnel keep the assailants outside the church compound gate – in the bombing by Islamic extremists reportedly from the Boko Haram sect.

Pam's husband, Sunday Davou Pam, told Compass that before leaving for the service at St. Finbarr's Catholic Church, his wife was preoccupied with preparations for her brother's wedding that morning and helping him settle with his bride-to-be.

"I was in a meeting at the back of the church in the men's fellowship meeting when the blast went off," Pam said. "And when we heard a loud explosion, we all rushed to the front of the church, only to find the dead bodies of many of our members lying scattered across the street. There were also many injured who were crying for help."

His wife, however, was nowhere to be found. He tried calling her cell phone, but it went unanswered, he said.

"I phoned her four times and still got no response," Pam said. "My friend, David Dung, was also searching for his wife, Regina, and eventually found her dead body, but my wife was nowhere to be found."

The suicide bombers had detonated the explosives after security personnel stopped them at the gate of the church compound, killing mainly people outside the sanctuary – some instantly, and others later in hospitals, including an 8-year-old boy who succumbed to his injuries at 1 a.m. today, according to church sources. After a desperate search, Pam finally found his wife's remains.

"I saw a dead body with no arms, and the lower part of the body was also blown off to pieces," he said. "I also saw a hand that had a ring on its finger. The hand was that of my wife. That is how I found the partial part of her body and collected it for burial."

Pam said his wife was a leader of the women's fellowship in the parish and community. They had been married for 32 years.

Searching Morgues

Dominic Dung Tari told Compass that his wife, Rose, had only one thing on her mind before leaving for church that morning – money for the Sunday service offering. He was staying home ill with a fever, and she asked him for money.

"I could not give her the money she requested because I did not have a dime on me," Tari said. "I asked our son whether he could spare us some little amount to enable their mother to have something to give as offering in the church, but he too had only 500 naira. So, she left for the church without having anything to offer as offering."

Still at home at the time of the blast, Tari rushed out when he heard the explosion. Growing more anxious each minute that his wife did not call him, shaken, he ran to the church site. Unable to find her, he returned home.

"Just when I returned to my house, my mobile phone rang and I quickly grappled with it to receive the call, but then it was not from my wife," he said. "I was told there is a corpse among the dead that resembles my wife. I raced back again to the church."

Emergency rescue workers, however, had already taken the body along with others to the morgue, he said. He set out on the task of visiting morgues.

"I went 'round the various hospitals – JUTH [Jos University Teaching Hospital], Plateau Specialist Hospital, and the Air Force Military Hospital – in all these hospitals, I could still not find my wife's corpse," Tari said.

With the help of family members, her remains were finally located at the Plateau State Specialist Hospital morgue, he said.

"The corpse had no head, no legs and was in pieces," he said. "We only identified those pieces of human flesh as hers because of the clothes she wore."

Her remains were buried yesterday at her family's house.

"My wife was a devout Christian," Tari said. "She was a member of the global ministries team and a very prayerful woman. To us, she was a mother, a sister, and a wife I so much loved."

He said the attacks on Christians in Nigeria amount to a war waged by Muslim extremists against Christians. Sunday's attack followed a Feb. 26 bomb blast outside the church walls of a Church of Christ in Nigeria service that killed at least three Christians.

"I am an ex-service man [retired military] – I know what a war is," he said. "What is happening in Nigeria today is a war against the church. We need to fight back spiritually, as this is the only way we as Christians can survive it."

Death Toll

Among those killed in the in the blast, church sources said, was Tari Benjamin, who would have been 9 years old on March 26. Emmanuel David, 16, who like Tari was a Boy Scout helping to secure the church compound, was also killed in the blast.

Tari's mother, Rose Benjamin, told Compass that her son died this morning at about 1 a.m. in the Intensive Care Unit of Jos University Teaching Hospital from burns from the bomb attack.

Besides the two boys and Rose Dominic Dung Tari, Roseline Kumbo Pam, and Regina David Dung, other church members killed in the blast were Emmanuel Kanke, Henry Chuwang, Matthew Dalyop and Ahmadu Choji.

Rose Benjamin said her 8-year-old son had a premonition he was about to die.

"He returned to the house after attending the Sunday school class, and then while placing his hands on my shoulders, told me he was returning to the church for his last duty," she said. "I did not understand what he meant by that – not until he died this morning did his last moment with me that Sunday morning come to memory."

Tari, the second of three children and known to be a hard-working and intelligent pupil at school, had left for church wearing his Boys Scout uniform and joined other Scouts, she said.

"They were working alongside security men, screening worshippers before allowing them entry into the church, before the suicide bombers crashed into them when they refused to allow them into the church," she said.

While church member accounts varied as to whether there were two or three bombers in the car, they agreed that one of them was disguised as a woman, wearing a wig.

Several members of the church were still missing – not located among the wounded in hospitals or among the dead in morgues. Their relatives said they fear they may have been obliterated when the bombs went off; emergency rescue workers have collected bags of human body parts.

The body of 16-year-old Emmanuel David, an orphan whose father died in 2007, was found under debris of the church gate, said his uncle, Raphael Elisha Davou, 60.

"He and others refused to allow the bombers into the church premises," Davou said. "Their refusal to allow the bombers into the church forced the bombers to detonate the bomb outside the church gate. It was the impact of the explosion that crashed the car into the gate and killed the youths and other security men with them. They died to save many other members of the church."

Boko Haram, the name given to the Islamic extremist group officially called *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* – "The People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" – seeks to impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on Nigeria. The name Boko Haram translates loosely as "Western education is forbidden."

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*.

Subsequent Violence

Apart from the bombing deaths, confusion is growing about subsequent violence.

While some state health and police sources have reported unconfirmed "reprisal" attacks against Muslims, witnesses have reported additional deaths of Christians at the hands of military personnel. Compass sources said soldiers killed four Christians when youths confronted them, asking them to leave the city because they had allowed suicide bombers to carry out attacks on churches.

The Jos-based Stefanos Foundation reported soldiers arriving at the church as people were searching for loved ones and opening fire on the crowd, killing several. Local press reported Special Task Force soldiers rushing to the scene of the blast and trying to control protestors by opening fire. Plateau state police spokesman Samuel Dabai reportedly said at least 10 people were killed and at least 10 others injured from the military action.

When Compass visited the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) and the Plateau State Specialist Hospital yesterday, authorities confirmed 17 corpses in their morgues. Dr. Ishaya Pam, chief medical director at JUTH, said the hospital had received seven bodies and "about 12" injured persons, while Dr. Bitrus Matawal, medical director of Plateau Specialist Hospital, said there were 10 corpses in the hospital's morgue brought from the church and seven injured Christians receiving treatment.

The Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, archbishop of the Catholic Diocese of Jos, appealed for calm on the part of Christians, saying God was not unaware of their suffering.

"We have a faith that preaches the respect of the sanctity of the human life," Kaigama said. "We have a faith and have the ability to reason. So, we must not behave like those who believe they are serving God by killing others."

12 dead in suicide bomb blast at Catholic Church in Jos

CSW (13.03.2012) - There is increasing anxiety in the Christian community of Jos in Plateau State following a second suicide bombing at a church within a two week period, which claimed eight lives.

The suicide bomber detonated the bomb, which was in his car, just outside the gate of St Finbarr's Catholic Church in the Rayfield area on Sunday 11 March, after a policeman prevented him from driving onto the premises. The impact was heard up to two kilometres away, and shattered the glass in buildings within a 200m radius. Three of the victims were women who were leaving the church after the first service of the day, and one of them was pregnant.

In an interview, the Rev Father Peter Omore of St Finbarr's Catholic Church, said that the second service had just started when they heard the explosion. "The Church shook and the glass shattered and the PVC ceiling all fell in... I do not know the number of casualties now."

The Plateau State Commissioner for Information expressed his grief at the incident. The Anglican Archbishop of Jos, Rt Rev Benjamin Kwashi, said, "It is worrying that two bombs have gone off within the space of two weeks, and many are fearing a third. Most importantly, a palpable terror is being unleashed on Christians so that Sunday is transformed from a day of worship into a day of fear. We are appealing to the church worldwide to pray without ceasing, and to members of the international community to

speak up and take action on our behalf so that we are able to enjoy full religious freedom and worship God freely and without fear."

The blast provoked an angry reaction from local youths, who are not affiliated with the church, and in the immediate aftermath three men on motorcycles were killed and their vehicles set on fire. When the youths went to the nearby Joint Task Force (JTF) security post demanding to know how the car had eluded checks, and insisting that the soldiers leave, four of them were shot and injured by the security forces. The youths later refused to be placated by the governor and reportedly demanded the removal of the security forces from the state so that they could be responsible for their own defence, adding that they would be taking all necessary measures. They then proceeded to drive the soldiers out of the area and mounted their own road block.

Five other people were reportedly killed in ensuing violence in the Ungwan Rukuba area last night and this morning. Early reports of ten deaths from "reprisal attacks", which were widely circulated, cannot be confirmed by sources on the ground, and stoked tensions in the volatile situation.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We express our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who died in the suicide bomb attack on St Finbarr's Catholic Church, and in the subsequent violence. There is clearly frustration with the inability of the security forces to get to grips with the attacks on churches, and there are concerns that in the case of Plateau State, efforts are being made to shift the focus from Boko Haram to blaming churches for the violent response of youths from local tribes. We urge the federal government to make the security of Plateau State an urgent priority, to restore peace and security to civilians in Jos."

Another church in Jos hit by suicide bombing

At least three dead in blast by suspected Islamic terrorists

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (11.03.2012) – Two weeks after a suicide bomb attack by the Islamist sect Boko Haram during a church service here left at least three Christians dead, a similar blast during a Catholic Mass today killed at least three people.

As in the Feb. 26 bomb blast outside the church walls of the Church of Christ in Nigeria service, security personnel action apparently forced the suspected Islamic extremists approaching St. Finbar's Catholic Church in Rayfield, an affluent area of Jos, to detonate their bomb before their car reached the sanctuary where worship was taking place, eyewitnesses said.

At Jos University Teaching Hospital, 14 people were reportedly receiving treatment for wounds following today's explosion, which damaged the church's roof, windows and a portion of a fence surrounding its compound. Others received treatment and were released.

Damian Babang, 26, a parishioner at the church, told Compass that he had just completed a reading during the service when he heard the explosion.

"The next thing I saw was the ceiling of the church falling on us and cries of people struggling to get out of the church," he said. "Many people are injured, and many have

died. I cannot say how many died or injured, but I saw dead bodies being carried away, as well as the injured.”

Babang, visibly traumatized as he spoke inside the church building, said he did not understand why churches have become targets of Muslim terrorists.

Retaliatory attacks by Christian youths reportedly took at least seven other lives today.

The Rev. Emmanuel Kundum told Compass that he had concluded the second Mass and left the third service to be conducted by another priest when he heard the explosion at 10:30 a.m.

“On getting outside, I saw members of our church rushing out from the church too – many were injured and others were dead,” Kundum told Compass.

The priest said he was unsure of the number of people killed, as both the dead and the injured were evacuated to various hospitals in Jos by workers of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Red Cross Society. At press time NEMA reported three bodies at the site, but it was not clear if those included the suicide bombers.

“It is very difficult for us to say how many of our parishioners that were either killed or injured,” Kundum said. “NEMA officials removed the dead and the injured to hospitals in the city. We are waiting for them to provide us with the details after calm is restored.”

St. Finbar’s is one of the largest Catholic parishes in Jos, with an average attendance of more than 3,000 worshippers each Sunday.

Jos, often described as a religious fault line between the north and the south, has been the site of numerous large-scale and isolated incidents of violence containing a religious component.

Suspected Islamic extremists detonated a bomb outside a church building in Suleja, Niger state, on Feb. 19, two months after Boko Haram Islamists killed 44 Christians and blinded seven in a Christmas Day church bombing in nearby Madalla. The Feb. 19 blast injured at five Christians.

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.

Boko Haram, the name given to the Islamic extremist group officially called Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad – “The People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad” – seeks to impose a strict version of sharia (Islamic law) on Nigeria. The name Boko Haram translates loosely as “Western education is forbidden.”

Suicide bombers attack worship service in Jos

At least one Christian dead, 38 injured in blast at denominational headquarters

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (26.02.12) – Two suicide bombers from the Boko Haram Islamist sect drove a car laden with bombs into the worship service of a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation here this morning, killing at least one Christian girl and injuring dozens of other church members, sources said.

A man claiming to be a spokesman for Boko Haram reportedly claimed responsibility for the blast. The two suicide bombers broke through a security barrier at the gate of the church building at 7:20 a.m., a church leader said.

“When the bombs went off, I saw the dead body of one girl and four other members of our church who were injured,” said Yakubu Dutse, director of finance at COCIN headquarters, which is located in the same building.

Dutse said one of the bombers was shot dead and one was injured by soldiers posted as security guards before the bombs went off, killing the second assailant as well.

“When they were stopped at the gate of the church, they refused to stop, hence the soldiers posted to the church shot at the car,” he said.

Church member Felix Apollos rushed to the scene of the attack minutes after the bombs went off; he told Compass that he saw the bodies of five people killed in the attack, but the identities of the dead were yet to be confirmed at press time. At least 38 people were reportedly injured in the blast.

“I saw some Red Cross personnel moving both the dead and the injured into ambulances,” Apollos said. “I saw five dead bodies and about seven injured Christians being moved into vehicles. But then the number of the injured may be higher than this, as there were already some injured that were taken to the hospital before I got here.”

Apollos said members of a security force manning the church gate tried to stop the assailants, but soldiers also guarding the church ordered them to allow the bombers onto the premises.

“Just when the bombers got onto the church premises, they crashed into the church building,” Apollos told Compass.

The COCIN church holds two worship services on Sunday mornings, one at 7 and one at 10. The second service was cancelled, as were most church services throughout Jos.

The car used in the attack was blown to pieces, and seven other cars were also destroyed.

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Jos, often described as a religious fault line between the north and the south, has been the site of numerous large-scale and isolated incidents of violence containing a religious component.

COCIN is one of the largest evangelical Christian denominations in Nigeria, with a large concentration in northern Nigeria. COCIN was established in Nigeria in 1904 by the Sudan United Mission by the leadership of Dr. Karl Kunn.

A number of COCIN congregations and other churches have come under attack by Boko Haram recently in northern Nigeria. In Borno state last year, the Rev. David Usman of the COCIN church in Maiduguri was murdered by Boko Haram. The denomination's church buildings in Geidam, Damaturu, and Potiskum, all in Yobe state, also have been bombed.

COCIN church members have also been attacked in Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro Local Government Areas of Bauchi state. Early morning attacks in Tafawa Balewa, on Jan. 22 left at least seven Christians dead and a church building destroyed. The attack on the Evangelical Church Winning All Church 2, residents of Tafawa Balewa said, was carried out by area Islamic extremists alongside members of the Boko Haram sect, with the church building and surrounding houses bombed.

Suspected Islamic extremists detonated a bomb outside a church building in Suleja, Niger state, on Feb. 19, two months after Boko Haram Islamists killed 44 Christians and blinded seven in a church bombing in nearby Madalla. The Feb. 19 blast injured at five Christians.

Persecution increased most in Sudan, Nigeria

Open Doors' 2012 World Watch List ranks countries where Christians suffered in 2011

By Jeff M. Sellers

Compass Direct News (04.01.12) – Sudan and northern Nigeria saw steeper increases in persecution against Christians than 48 other nations where Christians suffered abuse last year, according to an annual ranking by Christian support organization Open Doors.

Sudan – where northern Christians experienced greater vulnerability after southern Sudan seceded in a July referendum, and where Christians were targeted amid isolated military conflicts – jumped 19 places last year from its 2010 ranking, from 35th to 16th, according to Open Doors' 2012 World Watch List. In northern Nigeria, a rash of Islamist bombings, guerrilla-style attacks and increased government restrictions on Christians contributed to the region leaping by 10 on the list, from 23rd to 13th place.

"Nigeria continues to be the country where the worst atrocities in terms of loss of life occur, with over 300 Christians losing their lives this year, though the true number is thought to be far higher," according to the Open Doors report, noting that the Islamic extremist Boko Haram (literally, "Western learning is forbidden") became increasingly violent across the reporting period through most of 2011.

As it has the previous nine years, North Korea topped the list as the country where Christians are most persecuted, with a persecution index of 88. The list is based on a questionnaire filled out by Open Doors in-country field personnel and cross-checked with independent experts. Countries are then ranked according to their points total, or index.

Both Sudan and northern Nigeria saw their persecution indices rise more than other countries' – Sudan by 16.5, from 37 in 2010 to 53.5 last year, and northern Nigeria by 9,

from 44 to 55. The persecution index for three other countries rose by at least 5 points – Egypt from 47.5 to 53.5, Ethiopia from 30 to 36, and Indonesia from 26.5 to 31.5.

In terms of ranking, Egypt landed at 15 in the 2012 list after being ranked 19 last January, before political chaos loosened the grip on Islamic extremists; Ethiopia went from 43rd to 38th place, and Indonesia from 48th to 43rd place. Most of the countries on the list, 38 out of 50, have an Islamic majority – including nine of the top 10.

“As the 2012 World Watch List reflects, the persecution of Christians in these Muslim countries continues to increase,” said Carl Moeller, president/CEO of Open Doors USA. “While many thought the Arab Spring would bring increased freedom, including religious freedom for minorities, that certainly has not been the case so far.”

In the case of Sudan, the secession of mainly Christian southern Sudan left Christians in (north) Sudan “much more isolated under President Omar al-Bashir,” who is wanted for crimes against humanity, according to the Open Doors report.

“In response to the loss of the south, he has vowed to make his country even more Islamic, promising constitutional changes,” the report states. “On the ground, however, Christian communities have been attacked in complex battles over resources, and estimates of thousands killed by the Sudanese military are known of, yet impossible to verify.”

Territorial violence flared on border areas with South Sudan in the provinces of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and “Christian communities were disproportionately affected,” according to the report.

In Egypt, a bomb attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria killed at least 21 Christians on New Year’s Day, 2011, and the Feb. 11 ouster of President Hosni Mubarak was followed by a series of Islamic extremist attacks on Christians that culminated in the Maspero massacre in Cairo on Oct. 9, “when the military turned on its own citizens,” killing 27 Coptic Christian demonstrators, the report notes.

“Some were shot by soldiers or ran over by tanks, while others were killed by Muslim extremists,” the report states. “At the closing of 2011, Islamist parties flourished in the November elections, prompting some to speak of an Arab Winter instead of an Arab Spring for Christians.”

China moved from 20th place to 21st on the list, “mainly due to other countries comparatively getting worse,” though it still has the world’s largest persecuted church of 80 million, the report notes. That it dropped out of the top 20 this year “is due in large part to the house church pastors knowing how to play ‘cat and mouse’ with the government,” the report states – that is, knowing how not to attract the attention of authorities, such as not putting up church name signs, limiting worship attendance to no more than 200, and not singing too loudly.

A new addition to the list is Kazakhstan at 45th place, and Colombia returned to the list at 47th after being absent in the 2011 and 2010 editions.

Kazakhstan moved onto the list due to the passage of “an invasive and restrictive religion law” requiring the re-registration of all religious communities, the report notes. The law will make youth work virtually illegal and put all religious acts under government scrutiny, it adds.

Colombia had been included on the World Watch List annually before 2010, with left-wing insurgencies as well as paramilitary groups targeting Christian pastors. During the reporting period these movements “have branched into narco-trafficking, and Christian

leaders that will not cooperate in the drug trade are targeted for assassination," the report notes. "Five were killed this year, and it is thought the number could be as high as 20."

After North Korea, the top 10 on the list are Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Iran, the Maldives, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Pakistan. Pakistan entered the top 10 for the first time with a spike in radical Islamist violence that included the assassination of the nation's highest-ranking Christian politician, Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, for his efforts to change Pakistan's blasphemy law.

Seven Christians killed in Bauchi State

Many injured, church building destroyed.

By Obed Minchakpu

Compass Direct News (24.01.2012) – Early morning attacks in Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi state on Sunday (Jan. 22) left at least seven Christians dead and a church building destroyed.

The attack on the Evangelical Church Winning All Church 2, residents of Tafawa Balewa said, was carried out by area Islamic extremists alongside members of the Boko Haram sect, with the church building and surrounding houses bombed.

Yunnana Yusufu, a pastor with the Church of Christ in Nigeria in Tafawa Balewa, told Compass that the assailants arrived in the early morning hours and began shooting at Christians in the town, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Bauchi City.

"I saw seven dead bodies of some of the Christians killed," Yusufu told Compass by phone. "The situation is terrible, and I am about to go out to other parts of the town, to see the extent of the damage caused by the attackers."

Yusufu said that many other Christians were injured.

"Some of them have been taken to the General Hospital here, while others are being treated at home by medical personnel who are Christians," he said.

All churches have cancelled services.

"The situation we are in calls for attention to the injured and taking appropriate steps to calm frayed nerves over the attack," he said.

Bauchi Police Commissioner Ikechukwu Aduba reportedly confirmed the attack on Tafawa Balewa, saying two soldiers and a policeman, as well as eight civilians were later killed in a gunfight. He added that six suspects had been arrested.

Police also reported that bombs were thrown at a Catholic church building and an evangelical church building in Bauchi City, causing little damage and no deaths or injuries.

Bukata Zhadi, secretary of the Christian Elders Council in Tafawa Balewa, said attacks on Christian communities in the area have been incessant, with Sunday's attack bringing to 10 the number of Christians killed in the past two weeks in Tafawa Balewa.

A fortnight ago, gunmen believed to be Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked three Christian farmers on their farms in Pyakman village, near Tafawa Balewa, killing the three of them. Corpses recovered from the farms had bullet wounds and machete cuts, Zhadi said.

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Death toll rises in Kano state blasts, attacks foiled in Bauchi state

CSW (23.01.2012) – A series of bomb blasts rocked Bauchi and Kano states in northern Nigeria at the weekend, with the death toll in Kano estimated to be over 185 people.

Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for multiple bombings and a shooting spree targeting the immigration services, police headquarters and State Security Service (SSS) building in Kano, claiming at least 185 lives. The group promised to unleash multiple blasts there after one of their cells was uncovered in December 2011, stating at the time that they had left Kano untouched, but would take action if their people were not released. In an open letter to the people of Kano following the weekend's bombings, Boko Haram's spokesman Abul Qaqa said that only the intervention of un-named Muslim scholars was preventing the group from unleashing an "endless campaign of violence" on the state.

The Anglican Bishop of Kano spoke to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) after identifying the corpse of a member of his congregation who had been missing since Friday: "The target was the government, but who is the government? It is the people."

Both Muslims and Christians were caught up in the bombings and subsequent shootings; however, there is unease in the Christian community that they may be directly targeted in future, as has occurred in the past when reprisals for events occurring abroad have been visited upon the local Christian community. As a result, many Christians from southern Nigeria are reported to be flocking to bus depots, either to return home or to flee to Abuja. Other Christians are also vowing to leave the city.

On Sunday 22 January in Bauchi Metropolis, Bauchi State, bombs were planted at the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) 2 in the Railway Area and Our Lady of St Lauretto Catholic Church, Fadama Mada, which sustained minor damage to their walls. There were no injuries or fatalities as the bombs exploded in the early hours of the morning.

On the same day in Tafawa Balewa Town, St Paul's Anglican Secondary School was partially destroyed by a bomb. An attempted attack on a police station was foiled and two of the would-be bombers were arrested and later confessed to the church attacks. There was also an attempted robbery of First Bank, and an attack on a hotel and military checkpoint in the Bununu District. The violence claimed the lives of two army officers, a deputy superintendent of police and eight civilians, including a child.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We express our deepest condolences to the families that lost loved ones in Kano and Bauchi during the weekend's violence. There is no conceivable justification for the mindless spree of brutality that has been unleashed in northern and central Nigeria, and has claimed the lives of so many innocent civilians, Muslim and Christian alike. It is vital that state and federal officials and security agents

maintain a state of alertness and take all necessary measures to end Boko Haram's reign of terror, while ensuring that the rights of the innocent are protected."

Suspected Nigeria Islamists kill five in north

Reuters (16.01.2012) - Gunmen shot dead five people in their homes in two northern Nigerian cities on Monday, security forces said, the latest in a string of deadly attacks by suspected members of the Boko Haram Islamist sect.

"Two people have been shot dead today by Boko Haram in Maiduguri," the operations officer for the remote northeastern city, Victor Ebheleme, told Reuters.

"The area in which the attack took place has been cordoned off and the killers have been trailed, but no arrests have been made yet."

Three Chadians were also killed in the volatile city of Damaturu, police commissioner for the city and its surrounding state of Yobe, Lawal Tanko, said.

Boko Haram wants sharia law applied across Nigeria, which is roughly split equally between Christians and Muslims. The group's low level insurgency has intensified in the past year, becoming a major security headache for President Goodluck Jonathan.

Jonathan declared a state of emergency in several regions in Nigeria on December 31, closing Nigeria's borders with Niger, Cameroon and Chad, after a spate of Christmas Day attacks on churches and other targets.

Gunmen shot dead two Chadians on Sunday, as well, authorities said.

Maiduguri is Boko Haram's heartland and Damaturu is increasingly a focal point for its militant activity.

Damaturu was the scene of fierce gunbattle between the military and Boko Haram on December 24, when more than 50 people were killed, mostly sect members.

Police: At least 20 killed as sect attacks town hall during meeting in rural northeast Nigeria

Associated Press (06.01.2012) - Suspected gunmen from a radical Muslim sect attacked a town hall Friday in rural northeast Nigeria, killing at least 20 people who had gathered for a meeting of a Christian ethnic group, police said.

The attack at noon targeted a town hall where Christian Igbo people were holding a meeting, with gunmen chanting "God is great" as they fired Kalashnikov rifles.

The killings come after a spokesman for the sect known as Boko Haram threatened to begin specifically targeting Christians living in the country's Muslim north in its increasingly bloody sectarian fight with Nigeria's weak central government. That could further inflame religious tensions in an uneasy nation already gripped by civil unrest.

The attack occurred in Mubi in Adamawa state as Igbo traders held a meeting before opening up their shops for business, local police commissioner Ade T. Shinaba said.

"We started hearing many gunshots through the windows," said Okey Raymond, 48, who attended the meeting. "Everyone scampered for safety, but the gunmen chanted: 'God is great God is great' while shooting at us."

Raymond said he hid under a table and escaped out a back door. The gunmen also carried knives and machetes, the police commissioner said.

No arrests have been made in the attack, which left at least another 15 people wounded.

Friday's attack comes after gunmen attacked a church in the northeast Nigeria city of Gombe during a prayer service Thursday night, spraying the congregation with gunfire and killing at least eight people including the pastor's wife, local medical officials said. No one has claimed responsibility for that attack, though Boko Haram has targeted churches in the past in its campaign to implement strict Shariah law across Nigeria.

Boko Haram, whose name means "Western education is sacrilege" in the local Hausa language, is responsible for at least 510 killings last year alone, according to an Associated Press count.

The group claimed responsibility for an attack that killed at least 42 people in a Christmas Day bombing of a Catholic church near Abuja, as well as a suicide car bombing targeting the U.N. headquarters in the capital that killed 25 people and wounded more than 100.

Nigeria's central government has been slow to respond to the sect. On Dec. 31, President Goodluck Jonathan declared regions of Borno, Niger, Plateau and Yobe states to be under a state of emergency — meaning authorities can make arrests without proof and conduct searches without warrants. He also ordered international borders near Borno and Yobe state to be closed.

However, the areas where the recent church and town hall attacks happened are not in the areas marked by the president.

The attack also comes after a spokesman for Boko Haram told The Daily Trust newspaper, northern Nigeria's paper of record, that the group would begin targeting Christians living in Nigeria's Muslim north.

Igbo traders, who belong to one of the country's three dominant ethnic groups, do business and live across Nigeria's north though the Igbo traditionally have lived in the country's southeast. The group has been targeted in the north before. In the months before the country's 1960s civil war, Igbos fled the north after violence against them saw as many as 10,000 people die.
