

A Demonic Alliance: Boko Haram Joins Forces With ISIS

Boko Haram, the Nigeria-based Islamist terror group, has pledged allegiance to ISIS, according to an audio message purported to be from Boko Haram's leader.

Todd Nettleton, spokesman with the Voice of the Martyrs USA, says recent reports on ISIS showing up in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia are also no surprise. It's a shared ideology, but it's more than that. He explains that since Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared a caliphate in northeastern Nigeria, the territory falls under new rules. First, "There are very specific stipulations about what is and what is not a 'caliphate.' One of the things: ... The leader of the caliphate, the caliph, needs to be a descendant of the prophet (Muhammad). Abu Bakr al Baghdadi is a descendant of the prophet (Muhammad)." More disconcerting, "The other thing it talks about, though, is the duty of religious Muslims to support the caliphate when there is one in place. So I think what we're seeing with Boko Haram, what we're seeing in other countries around the world, is Muslims really answering a call."

Coming under ISIS leadership lends legitimacy to Boko Haram. "It does point to a unified system of Islamic terrorism, Islamic extremism that is now pledging allegiance to each other," Nettleton notes. With attacks now from both Chad and Niger in the effort to get rid of Boko Haram, could the pledge be a plea for rescue? It's certainly a possibility. "The other thing that really will be interesting to see is how the two sides communicate, if they share training materials, if they share fighters."

Slick marketing tactics also accompany the merge. Should Boko Haram be fully embraced by ISIS, they would no longer be seen

as the jihadi pariahs. Tactics could shift to mimic the brutality on the immolations, mass beheadings and worse. Nettleton suggests that the situation bears watching, even if nothing materializes in the near future.

Then, "As far as the Christians in northeastern Nigeria, their situation hasn't changed. Whether Boko Haram pledges allegiance to ISIS or not, Boko Haram is still attacking Christians, they were bombing churches, they were even killing Christians. The situation on the ground really probably doesn't change that much." Churches, mosques, schools, homes, government buildings and businesses are regularly burned and destroyed by angry rioters during outbreaks of violence that often involve both Christians and Muslims.

VOM has been responding by providing funds to the family, or helping the family become self-sufficient in the longer term; they place orphans in foster care or in a children's home; through VOM Medical, they provide practical care and support for members of the persecuted church needing surgery, care and counseling.

However, 2014 was one of the bloodiest years for believers, and that could be eclipsed with the ISIS pledge. "Pray for the protection of our brothers and sisters. We want to pray for their encouragement, that they won't grow weary and discouraged by these developments, that they'll continue to serve the Lord and even to reach out," urges Nettleton. He also asks that you pray for a miracle of the heart, too. "Pray for people in Boko Haram, people in the Islamic State, to have an encounter with Christ and come to know Him in a personal way."