

Baptist President Urges Nigerian Government to Curtail Terror Attacks on Christians

The president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), the Rev. Dr. Samson Olasupo Ayokunle, has tasked the Nigerian government and the country's armed forces to make spirited efforts toward curtailing terror attacks on churches in the country by Boko Haram, the Islamic sect spearheading attacks against Christians.

Ayokunle made the call on Jan. 13 at an interdenominational church service held in Abuja to mark this year's Armed Forces Remembrance Day, at the National Christian Centre, in Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital city.

The Baptist president made the call just as news about the arrest of one of the leaders of the Boko Haram was announced by the nation's security agencies in Abuja.

Boko Haram leader Hassan Pagi Bukar was arrested Jan. 12 in Abuja at the residence of a former member of Nigeria's lower chamber of the National Assembly, the House of Representatives.

Preaching on the theme: "Embracing the legacies of a worthy officer," Ayokunle quoted the biblical reference Luke 7: 1-10 and enumerated six attributes of the Roman centurion he believes are worthy of emulation by the Nigerian armed forces, including "love, fear of God, faith in God, humility, loyalty, and contribution to nation building."

"It is one thing to be given an opportunity to serve, and it is one to leave a legacy. All you in positions of authority in

the country should know that you are called to serve and you owe the nation such a service," the Baptist leader told Nigerian President Jonathan and commanders of the Nigerian Armed Forces in the church.

"The centurion was an ambassador of Rome in Israel. Because of the love he has for his servant, he went out looking for Jesus. Soldiers should know that they do not have all the powers in the world as such powers belong to God. So, seek this from the Lord," Ayokunle told members of the Nigerian Armed forces.

Speaking on the legacy of love, the Baptist pastor urged commanders of the armed forces to: "Treat your subordinates with love. Show them love and do not abuse those serving you or in the community. Remember the story of Naaman, the Syrian soldier, who found the solution to his problem through his housemate, a person seen as not important."

Ayokunle challenged Nigerian Armed Forces to: "Fish out those who cause destruction in this nation and ensure they face the law." This he said, is because Christians have been made to face difficult times because of the ceaseless attack on them.

He also said: "You must have the fear of God, and in that way you will be able to serve the nation. If you fear God there would be no corruption in the country. So also, you must have faith in God. In spite of having a gun, the centurion sought for God's supernatural power. You are to provide protection to the people, and in doing this seek the face of God and his protection.

"The centurion humbly depended on Jesus. That is a measure of great humility for such a person to seek for Christ. All Nigerians must realize that humility is a virtue for the nation."

The Baptist president also said **Boko Haram** would not have succeeded in this country if there was complete loyalty to the

nation. "There are some in the armed forces who collaborate with them to destroy this nation. It is an act of disloyalty to connive to destroy the people. Do not dehumanize the people because you are licensed to hold a gun," he added.

The Baptist pastor called on the Nigerian government to provide the armed forces the necessary tools to fight terrorism, kidnappings, oil bunkering and other vices in the country. "Counter-terrorism must be taken seriously by the government," he said, adding that: "We must wage war against those who want to destroy this country. We must have a strong intelligence agency that will assist in providing the information that will lead to the checkmating of the menace of terrorism."

Prayers were said by ministers of the Gospel against terrorists in the country, asking God to cause confusion in their camps so that their plans will come to nothing.

The Rev. Nicholas Okoh, Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, prayed for widows and orphans of all those killed in suicide bombings against Christians in the country, and also for fallen soldiers who died in battles against terrorists.

President Jonathan, speaking at the church service, thanked the military, armed forces and the police for their gallantry in trying to restore peace to the nation through fighting against terrorists. He assured that: "Nigeria will not disintegrate as is being preached by some. In spite of these talks we will remain one," he said.

Jonathan urged all Nigerians to condemn those who seek to destroy the country through violent acts in the name of God. "Let us condemn those who preach about our disintegration. We all have our roles to play in order to actualize our vision. When we work together we can take our country to where we want to go," he said.