

Christian Persecutor Boko Haram Calls Truce, With Conditions

After three years of incessant attacks on places of worship and other public places, Nigeria's **Boko Haram** sect has called a truce.

The price of the ceasefire: freedom for the arrested members of the group and the rebuilding of the destroyed mosque of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf.

Too high a price to pay? For its part, the embattled Nigerian government said it would not make a formal pronouncement yet on the ceasefire until it had time to study the conditions. "It seems the government and the military are working on the assumption that this is a legitimate ceasefire offer. The military there has kind of taken a 30-day 'wait and see,'" notes Voice of the Martyrs spokesman Todd Nettleton.

"If there are no incidents, if there are no attacks, if there are no church bombings for the next 30 days, then we'll know they're serious and then we can move forward," adds Nettleton.

Boko Haram is loosely translated "Western education is sinful" in Hausa. The group had its origins in Borno state, and under the banner of fighting to impose Islamic law on Nigeria, spread to Adamawa, Abuja, Bauchi, Niger, Kano, Yobe, Kaduna and throughout other parts of Nigeria's northeast.

However, since the ceasefire was announced 17 days ago, nine women taking part in a polio vaccination campaign in Kano city were murdered, and three Korean medical doctors were killed in Yobe state. These attacks bear the hallmarks of the extremist group, but security forces admit that the violence could also have been a criminal gang profiting from the growing

lawlessness in Nigeria's northeast.

That raises doubts about how much effect a ceasefire would have on security. Nettleton agrees. He goes on to explain, "They want westerners out of northern Nigeria, and they want to push for Sharia law in northern Nigeria. It is hard to imagine, for me at least, a situation where they stop short of that and agree to some form of compromise. So this may just be a small period of them sort of regrouping, but again, it's just so early that we don't know how this is all going to play out."

As to the reason this story has flown under the radar? Past history and several broken accords litter this road paved with good intentions. Nobody knows who backed the idea or who will cooperate with the truce. "Is this widespread? Is this going to come down from the top to everybody? Is this one small group that wants to have some peace, and maybe there are others who don't?" Nettleton asks.

There is some cautious optimism. Nettleton says partners have been sending back reports. "In the city of Maiduguri, which is kind of the headquarters of Boko Haram, there are stories of businesses returning to somewhat normal business hours, people in the markets, people in the streets, more so than they have been." Still, the instability has taken its toll. "One of the impacts of the violence is that a lot of Christians have left the area. They simply have said, 'We don't have a future here,' so there's that. When you talk about outreach, it complicates things—even simply to have someone come visit your church."

People are jittery, especially those who gather on Sunday in church. "Any guests at a church right now in northern Nigeria are watched with some apprehension and even fear. I've heard of churches that are putting in metal detectors. I've heard of churches where the Christians literally are taking machetes with them to church in case there's a battle that breaks out

during the service, in case they have to fight their way out of the building.”

Please pray for God’s protection, regardless of whether the cease-fire holds. Pray that Muslims there will be reached with the Gospel. What’s interesting, says Nettleton, “is that more and more, Muslims are disenchanted with the things they’re hearing from the al-Qaida-linked Boko Haram. “The truth of Islam is coming out, and that can be a time of seed planting, and even a time of revival.”