

# Church Building Burned Down for the Second Time

Muslims burned down a church building in the early hours of Saturday (Aug. 10) in central Nigeria's Niger state, sources said.

The razing of the building of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) congregation in Kontagora town at about 3 a.m. was the second time Muslims have destroyed the worship auditorium at the site, said Associate Pastor Samson Ogbebor.

"I got a distress call that our church was on fire, and on getting there I met a church being burned down and properties therein looted by hoodlums," Pastor Ogbebor told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. "This church has faced lots of challenges – about 10 years ago, some Muslim hoodlums came and burnt it down completely, and through self-efforts we were able to rebuild the worship sanctuary."

Muslims in Kontagora had made several unsuccessful attempts to prevent the congregation from constructing the worship auditorium, he said.

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"We eventually completed the building of the church building, but they have not relented in their opposition to allowing us as Christians to have a place of worship in the town," Pastor Ogbebor said. "For a second time they have burnt down the sanctuary."

Church member Markus Emmanuel said he rushed to the site after receiving a call about the fire at the Champion Parish, Kontagora town.

“The building was completely razed by fire,” Emmanuel told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. “Some residents close to the church building told us that they saw a group of Muslims who came into the church premises and set fire on the building.”

Emmanuel said the building was still under construction when it was burned 10 years ago.

“This is the second time our worship sanctuary has been destroyed, as 10 years back, a group of Muslim fanatics who were opposed to the church building being constructed at that site set fire on it, before the worship building was reconstructed,” he said.

Church deacon John Aboje called on Muslim leaders in the town to take measures toward preserving religious freedom of Christians in the predominantly Muslim Kontagora Local Government Area.

“We just want to plead with the state government and the Kontagora Muslim emirate to look into the issue by compelling the perpetrators to allow freedom of worship,” Aboje said.

The Rev. Bulus Dauda Yohanna, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Niger State Chapter, confirmed the destruction of the worship auditorium in a statement issued on Saturday (Aug. 10).

“The destruction of the RCCG worship building is not only barbaric and unwarranted, but also a very painful experience to the Christian community in Kontagora town,” Yohanna said. “There’s the need for government officials in Kontagora to take strict measures towards putting an end to such ungodly activities of fanatics. This incident has created religious tension.”

Christians were hoping that the law would take its course, he said.

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“To be frank, issues like this must be tamed, and people who have done this should be fished out and made to face the law,” Yohanna said.

Aisha Wakaso, media aid to Gov. Mohammed Bago, said in a statement that the governor condemned the destruction of the church building.

“We totally condemn this act and tell our Christian brothers and sisters, as well as other Niger state inhabitants, that the government prioritizes their safety, security, and freedom of religion,” Wakaso said. “Our state utilizes its diversity and the peaceful coexistence of all religious and ethnic groups. We will not condone this stupid act of violence.”

The governor has requested that all relevant security agencies conduct an immediate and complete inquiry into the attack, he said.

“We are convinced that the perpetrators of this horrible arson will be quickly discovered and prosecuted,” Wakaso said. “The administration will see that those involved are punished to the fullest extent of the law. We urge the people of Kontagora and Niger state to be calm and refrain from revenge or violence. Let us continue to collaborate to preserve the peace and togetherness that define our magnificent nation.”

In the 2024 WWL of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian, Nigeria was ranked No. 6, as it was in the previous year. Nigeria remained the deadliest place in the world to follow Christ, with 4,118 people killed for their faith from Oct. 1, 2022 to Sept. 30, 2023, according to Open Doors’ 2024 World Watch List (WWL) report. More kidnappings of Christians than in any other country also took place in Nigeria, with 3,300.

Nigeria was also the third highest country in number of attacks on churches and other Christian buildings such as hospitals, schools, and cemeteries, with 750, according to the report.

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