

Dozens Die in Nigeria Violence

✖ Dozens of people have died in Nigeria since Sunday in violent clashes involving Muslim militants who burned churches and a police station, and set off bombs near residential areas in the northern city of Maiduguri.

The violence began in Bauchi state on Sunday after the arrest of some members of a Muslim group called Boko Haram, which opposes Western education and wants Islam's strict Sharia law adapted across Nigeria, Reuters reported.

The fighting spread to the northern states of Borno, Kano and Yobe, which are all predominantly Muslim. The four states are among the 12 Nigerian states that in 2000 imposed a stricter enforcement of Sharia law. Since then more than 10,000 Nigerians have died in violence between Muslims and Christian minorities, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

National police said Monday at least 55 people have died in the violence since it began Sunday, including five police officers, according to the AP. But area residents say the death toll is much higher, estimating that more than 100 people have died, Reuters reported.

Some of the worst violence occurred Monday in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state and home of Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf. Residents there said youth armed with machetes, knives, homemade explosives and other weapons attacked police buildings and anyone resembling a government official or law enforcement officer, causing thousands to flee to two barracks in the city, Reuters reported.

Locals say Yusuf's followers are largely illiterate youth and jobless students who quit their university educations to support his view that Western education opposes Islam.

Residents told Reuters that most Muslim leaders in Maiduguri reject Yusuf's views.

Nigeria's 150 million people are split almost equally between Christians and Muslims, with Islam dominating the north and Christianity pervasive in the south.

On Monday, Nigerian President Umar Yar'Adua's ordered security forces "to take all necessary action to contain and repel the sad and shocking attacks by extremists on police posts and public buildings," the AP reported.