

Gun-Toting Muslim Extremists Kill Christians in Niger

Armed Muslims from Niger entered Nigeria's Kaduna state this month to help Islamists there invade Christian communities, where they killed two Christians, including a 10-year-old boy, area sources said.

In the early morning hours of Aug. 21, the Muslim extremists entered Fadiya Bakut village in Bajju district of the Zango-Kataf Local Government Area, and attacked the home of Andrew Allahmagani, the district head in Fadiya, Allahmagani told Compass by telephone.

Allahmagani said he was sleeping that morning when he suddenly heard gunshots near his residence.

"They [the attackers] later moved around the house shooting into windows and doors, including that of my wife," he said. "Afterward, they moved to the quarters of my brother, where they shot and killed my nephew, Fidelis Ishaku, who was 10 years old, and shot and injured my mother, who is 70."

A Christian security guard at the house, 52-year-old Zaman Kaki, was also killed in the attack by about 10 assailants armed with guns, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons, Allahmagani said. Kaki leaves behind a wife and four children.

The slain boy's grandmother, Laraba Ishaku, received a life-threatening wound in the thigh but survived after receiving treatment at Zonkwa Medical Center, he said. Also receiving hospital treatment for wounds was Bartholomew Ishaku, 20, and 31-year-old Clement Yohanna, he said.

Eyewitness Danjuma Sarki told Compass that about 30 spent shells were recovered from the scene of the attack, which kept many Christians from meeting for church services that day.

"The attackers wore black uniforms and shot sporadically," Sarki said.

Jonathan Asake, a former member of Nigeria's National Assembly, told Compass by phone that he got to the scene of the incident at about 7 a.m. and found Allahmagani's house littered with spent bullet shells, and some 20 bullets were also collected.

"The invaders who came as early as 12:30 a.m. to Fadiya Bakut village shot dead a lad who was caught by the bullet while fleeing with his mother," he added.

The former legislator said Christians in the community "summoned courage and chased the fleeing invaders. It was then brought to their attention, that a man with blood-stained clothes was sighted within the vicinity by dawn. A quick search uncovered the suspect. He was on the verge of being lynched when the police came to his rescue. He is now at the Zonkwa police station."

Kaduna State Police Spokesman Aminu Lawal confirmed the attacks, saying one of the assailants has been arrested.

"It is true that a security guard was killed, and a small boy was also killed," he said. "The target was not only the Christian community leader but also the Fadiya Bakut community."

On July 24 at about 1 a.m., Muslim marauders moving in three groups also attacked the villages of Angwan Yaro and Angwan Yuli in Sanga Local Government Area of the State, area residents said. The attacks forced Christians to stay away from worship services in order to keep watch on their communities.

Saidu Mallam, a Christian and a resident of Angwan Yaro village, told Compass that they learned of the planned invasion by Muslim militants and decided to take prompt

action.

"We got urgent information that strange Muslim gunmen have been noticed approaching our area, and we became worried and woke all of our people only to see the armed Muslims in groups," Mallam said. "The first group of Muslims numbered about 200, while the second and the third groups numbered about 300."

The first and the second groups did not begin attacking until the last group arrived, he said.

"They had guns, swords and other local weapons with some of them holding petrol in cans," Mallam said. "We were outnumbered as we had no arms. However, we resisted the invasion and they fled. We captured 15 of them. They have been handed over to soldiers who were drafted in to save us. The soldiers took them away."

Mallam said the gunmen were no doubt from Niger, called Nigeriens.

"They are strange people that you can identify as Nigeriens, and even their accent can convince you that they are not Nigerians," he said. "We have never experienced this kind of situation; we could not hold church services because we are still afraid. Some of the militants escaped into the bush, and we don't know what may happen in the night, though soldiers are here now."

Niger, 97 percent Muslim, has seen the rise of Islamic extremists groups in recent years, according to *Operation World*. It lies on Nigeria's Muslim-majority northern border.

Some of the Christians injured in the attacks are receiving treatment at General Hospital, Kafanchan. Three of the injured Christians were identified as Samuel Hassan, Maiwada Buki and Nyako Makeri.

The Rev. Joe Yari, spokesman for the Northern Nigerian Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), confirmed the attacks.

“All security agencies are aware about these attacks on Christian communities in the state,” said Yari, who is also the CAN chairman of the Jema’a Local Government Area.

Nigeria’s population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to *Operation World*.

Northern Nigeria climbed to 23rd place in 2010 from 27th in 2009 on Christian support organization Open Doors’ World Watch List of nations with the worst persecution.