

Injuries Severe After Nigeria Suicide Bomb Attack

Amid allegations that soldiers were responsible for at least eight of 21 deaths after the suicide bombing of two churches here on June 3, sources told Compass that most of those injured from the blast and alleged military shooting were in critical condition.

A statement reportedly from the Muslim extremist **Boko Haram** sect claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing of the Living Faith church in Yelwa, a Christian settlement on the outskirts of the northern Nigerian city of Bauchi. The blast also collapsed a wall of the nearby Harvest Field Church of Christ, leaving three people in critical condition.

Of 61 people taken to Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital Bauchi after the blast, 38 were in critical condition, a staff member told Compass on condition of anonymity; the other 23 have been treated and sent home. Church leaders said at a press conference on Monday (June 4) that 45 Christians were considered injured.

"Twenty-five out of these were injured by the bomb blast, while 20 sustained various degrees of injuries from the gunshots by soldiers," said the Rev. Lawi Pokti, chairman of the Bauchi chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, who said the military shot eight Christians to death.

The Nigerian military has yet to respond to the allegations. In similar church attacks in Nigeria, Christians angry that their brethren were being killed in the presence of security agencies have been shot for refusing military orders to leave.

Lamenting that Christians have been attacked and killed without provocation, still Pokti beseeched Christians to refrain from seeking revenge.

"We also wish to call on all Christians to remain calm and not to embark on any act of reprisal or vengeance, as this will constitute a criminal act and a violation of the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," he said.

Johnson Elogva, associate pastor at Living Faith, said most of the injuries were severe.

"Most of our members are critically ill in the hospitals," he said. "Some with first degree, second degree burns."

Elogva said many of the church's 2,000 members were traumatized, but that the battle belonged to the Lord.

"Like the Lord told Jehoshaphat not to go out and fight, so we too believe that the Lord will fight for us," he said. "These terrorists believe in chariots, but we trust in the Lord."

The pastor had completed the first worship service at 9:15 a.m. and had begun the second service when the congregation heard a loud blast that shook the sanctuary, he said.

"The glass windows were shattered, the roof of the church building was shaking and almost collapsing on us," he said. "Our church members were scattered, and they were running and jumping through all available entrances out of the sanctuary. There was smoke and fire all over outside."

Mbami Godiya, pastor of nearby Harvest Field Church of Christ, said 10 members of his congregation were injured – three critically – when the blast collapsed a wall of his church building.

He saw two cars being screened at the security point in front of the church compound, the second one containing the suicide bomber, when he turned his attention away from them, he said.

"Suddenly, there was a loud bang which brought part of my church building down," Godiya said. "Our church became very dark as fire engulfed it. In the midst of this darkness and

the cries from the members of my church, I shouted and called for calm, and asking them to lie down in case there were multiple explosions.”

The pastor said he saw the hand of God in that no one from his congregation died.

“Ten of my members who were injured were taken to the hospital,” he said. “Seven were treated and discharged, and three are still in critical condition.”

Most of the people from Living Faith who died had ended their morning worship service and were leaving the building, he said.

“They were all passing by the security check-point by my church when the explosion occurred,” Godiya said.

The government had sent security agents to keep watch over the churches based on threats to the area, but Godiya faulted the government approach.

“They should have mounted security check-points far away from the churches, but they came and mounted such check-points close to our churches, and that was the reason the bombers were able to get close,” he said.

Literally meaning “Forbidden Book” and translated as “Western education is forbidden,” Boko Haram has targeted churches, state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria.

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 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.

Five victims of the bombing were buried June 6, amid weeping and wailing.

Buried at Christian Cemetery in Yelwa at 12:30 p.m. were Irmia Hassan Dodo, 67; Joseph Kehinde Aiyedipe, 30, a student of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi; Samuel Olusegun, 16, student of the Divine International School, Bauchi; Augustine Effiong Ita, 32, an adolescent health specialist; and Suru Gbamgboshe, a final year student of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi.

Gauis Biyal, pastor of Living Faith church, urged mourners at the service not to seek revenge against those who think they are fighting for God by killing Christians.

"Vengeance belongs to the Lord; vengeance belongs to Jesus Christ who was persecuted for our sake," Biyal said. "It is He that can fight on our behalf. He knows what to do. If we try to do it ourselves, we will die in the process."