

# Islamic Group Reigning Terror on Christians in Nigeria

As Reverend Father Bonni Bazah was about to commence Holy Communion at St. Rita's Catholic Church, an SUV plowed through the walls of his church.

"I heard a loud bang on the wall. Suddenly, I saw the wall caving in towards us," Bazah said inspeaking with reporters from his hospital bed. "Then, I saw an SUV. I was about to shout for everyone to run away when I heard the loudest explosion I have ever heard. Immediately, I saw my body covered with blood and bodies were strewn around. After that I lost consciousness."

At 9:00 a.m. on October 28, an SUV loaded with explosives rammed into the side of St. Rita's Catholic Church. Once it had forced its way into the church, it detonated, claiming the lives of at least eight people, including the bomber, and injuring over 140 others.

The suicide bomber was reportedly detained at the church compound's gate before ramming through the gate and into the side of the church.

"All of the sudden [the SUV] drove [at a] high speed and rammed into the church wall, forcing its way into the church,"witness Samuel Emmanuel told the press. "Initially, I thought the driver had lost control of the vehicle, [but] suddenly there was a huge explosion as the vehicle reached the church building."

St. Rita's is located in Kaduna, a city in the heart of Nigeria's "Middle Belt" region. The Middle Belt is where the largely Christian South and the predominantly Muslim North collide. Nigeria's Middle Belt is also the stage where Boko Haram, an Islamic extremist group, has unleashed its campaign

of terror against Christians.

Although Boko Haram has yet to claim responsibility for the bombing at St. Rita's, many suspect the group's involvement. Rumors were circulating that Boko Haram was planning to carry out an attack on Christians during the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha, which ended two days before the SUV plowed through the walls at St. Rita's. In the past, Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for attacks on churches very similar to the one witnessed at St. Rita's.

Boko Haram is aiming to carve out a separate Islamic state in Nigeria's northern states, where it plans to implement a strict form of Sharia law. To date, Boko Haram has killed over 3,000 people as it continues to fight Nigeria's government for control of the North. The list of casualties includes many Christians killed in their places of worship.

Last year, Boko Haram demanded all Christians leave the northern states of Nigeria so it could create a purely Islamic society. Christians that stayed behind have become easy targets for Boko Haram's acts of terror, including suicide bombs at churches and drive-by shootings at Christian gathering places.

Many Christians in the Middle Belt region are living in a constant state of fear and taking measures to protect themselves as they gather for worship. Churches are installing metal detectors to ensure weapons and explosives are not brought into worship services by members of Boko Haram.

Fortunately, the security measures taken by some churches have saved many lives. At St. John's, security measures taken by the church saved the lives of many of their parishioners when they were attacked on Sept. 23.

In a statement to the press, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of St. John's said, "There would have been more casualties but people are now more security conscious. It was the first batch

of people [dismissed] from the church that were attacked. Luckily they were not so many.”

The newly formed Christian Association of Nigerian Americans has called on the U.S. government to designate Boko Haram a foreign terrorist organization, hoping that doing so will make it harder for Boko Haram to access weapons and funds. To date, the U.S. State Department has only designated three of Boko Haram’s leaders as terrorists; it has fallen short of labeling the group itself a terrorist organization.

Rev. James Fadele, the chairman of the Christian Association of Nigerian Americans, told reporters in Washington, D.C., “The extermination of Christians by Boko Haram is fast assuming the proportion of genocide.”

Both the Nigerian government and the US government must take a stand against Boko Haram and end its campaign of violence against Christians in Nigeria’s Middle Belt. If decisive action is not taken to confront the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, Christians will continue to be murdered in their places of worship on a weekly basis.

This could potentially lead to the complete extinction of Christianity in Nigeria’s Northern and Middle Belt regions.