

Islamists Vow to Eradicate Christians From Parts of Nigeria

Militant Islamist group **Boko Haram** has declared “war” on Christians in Nigeria, saying that they are planning coordinated attacks to “eradicate Christians from certain parts of the country.”

A spokesman for the group, which has stepped up its violent campaign against Christians in the North since Christmas, said on March 4: “We will create so much effort to end the Christian presence in our push to have a proper Islamic state that the Christians won’t be able to stay.”

Boko Haram’s actions over recent months indicate that this is no idle threat.

Following a series of attacks on churches and other targets in five states over Christmas that left more than 40 people dead, the group on New Year’s Day issued a three-day deadline for Christians to leave the North. Unrelenting attacks have ensued, including the bombing of a number of churches as well as attacks on individual Christians.

Most recently, on Feb. 26, a suicide bomber drove a car into the grounds of the Church of Christ headquarters in Jos. The vehicle exploded three metres from the church building; two women and an 18-month-old child were killed, and about 50 people were injured.

The violence is having the intended effect of driving Christians from the North. Nearly 95 percent of the Christians have left Yobe State, where 20 churches have been torched and many lives have been lost.

Some are heading to the mainly Christian South, while others are crossing the border into Cameroon. The mass migration is precipitating a major humanitarian and **spiritual crisis** in Nigeria; Northern Christians who have been forced to leave behind their homes and jobs are in great need, while, as the Christian presence diminishes, the church is being wiped off the map in the North.

Boko Haram has killed about 1,000 people since 2009 in its bloody campaign to establish an Islamic state in Northern Nigeria. As well as **attacking Christians**, the group targets police, security forces and politicians, and also Muslim leaders who oppose its agenda. More than 300 people have been killed so far this year.

The government has been trying to curtail Boko Haram's activities, deploying military units across the country, and arresting and killing a number of members in recent weeks. But, issuing the latest threat, the group's spokesman said that the government "cannot be prepared for what is to come".