

More Than 45 Churches Destroyed, 258 Civilians Killed as Nigeria's Northeast Descends Into Chaos

Boko Haram militants murdered at least 83 civilians in three separate villages across northeast Nigeria's predominantly Christian Gwoza area in Borno State. Faulty telecommunications equipment delayed reports of the incident from reaching Borno State's capital of Maidguri until Wednesday, June 4.

Uniformed men in camouflaged, military-grade trucks descended on Attagara, Agapalawa and Aganjara villages Tuesday, indiscriminately firing on and killing at least 83 civilians and wounding an unknown number of others.

According to eye-witness accounts, residents, who mistook the Boko Haram militants for Nigerian military personnel, were forced to flee in all directions as the armed men opened fire, destroyed homes, and burnt churches to the ground.

The attack, fifth in the Gwoza area in less than 10 days, pushed the rising death toll from 175 as of Sunday—when Boko Haram militants attacked a church, killing 9 parishioners, hours before detonating a suicide bomb near a bar, killing 45—to 258.

According to Titus Pona, chairman of the Borno state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, "Most of the villages attacked in since a week ago are dominated by over 80 percent Christians."

In a timely recognition of this most recent streak of violence, Open Doors USA ranked Nigeria as the most violent country in the world for Christians in its World Watch Top 10

Violence List. The list reads, in part, “Boko Haram continues to attack Christians on a large scale by burning down and bombing churches and Christian property, and assaulting and kidnapping Christian women and girls.”

Boko Haram, or “Western education is forbidden,” is a radical Islamic insurgency designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the United States and a recognized al-Qaida affiliate by a United Nations Security Council Committee, bent on establishing a separate Islamic state to be ruled by Shariah law.

The group is responsible for more than 12,000 deaths over the course of its existence, the destruction of hundreds of churches and schools, and even several mosques and Islamic holy sites.

In 2014 alone, Boko Haram has killed more than 1,500 persons, successfully carried out two car bombings in the nation’s capital of Abuja, and perpetrated the mass-kidnapping of more than 240 predominantly Christian schoolgirls, some of whom have since been forcefully converted to Islam and sold into domestic and sexual servitude.

“The most recent spate of attacks by Boko Haram once again indicates targeting of Christians and their vulnerability throughout northeast Nigeria. Boko,” said Cameron Thomas, International Christian Concern’s regional manager for Africa. “Haram continues to operate with utter impunity, opposed only by vigilante forces composed of villagers willing to sacrifice their lives in protection of loved ones.

“Decisive action must be taken, beyond mere words, by the international community and the Jonathan administration to bring an end to what is quickly becoming religiously-motivated genocide against Nigeria’s Christian population.”

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