

Muslim Extremists Torch Christian Churches, Homes in Nigeria

Christians from a local Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) congregation in this Plateau state town have been displaced after Muslim extremists set their church building and some homes on fire last month.

The Rev. Ishaku Danyok of the church told Compass that the April 29 incident occurred after Muslims approached Christian music shop owner Gabriel Kiwase and told him that his music was disturbing them as they said their prayers.

The young Christian man “quietly switched off the music set, and then the Muslims left, only to return about 20 minutes later to burn down the music shop and then go on rampage, burning down houses belonging to some Christians in the town,” Danyok said.

The pastor of the church of 85 members told Compass that their building, his own home and the property of five other Christians in the town were damaged in the hour-long attack.

“We brought in estate managers to work out the cost of properties belonging to our church that were destroyed in this attack, and we were told that we lost properties worth more than 29,347,215 naira [US\$184,520],” he said.

The pastor’s family, his wife and four children were left homeless, he said.

“We are now squatters with another family, as we lost everything to the fire,” he said, praising God that his family members were not hurt in the attack.

Other Christians who lost property included Joseph Sarauta,

Jonathan Madugu, Asabe Istifanus, Samuel Girma, and Sunday Gwantu, Yahuza Damisa, Amos Luka, and the Rev. Christopher Dare. These Christians, Danyok said, are from his church, a Roman Catholic parish and Deeper Life Bible Church in Dengi town.

Danyok said that as a result of the destruction, most members of his church have fled the town, reducing attendance at services to 50.

"They have fled to other towns, thereby reducing our numbers," he explained. "We currently worship in the destroyed church building with no roof to shield us from the sun and the rains."

Dengi town is predominantly Muslim, with Christians making up less than 10 percent of its population.

"In this town, we live under Muslim rulers," Danyok said, adding that only one of the 20 town council members is Christian.

According to Christian leaders in the town under the auspices of the Christian Association of Nigeria, the assault on Christians was premeditated and well-planned.

"The misunderstanding with the owner of the Christian music shop was only used as a smokescreen to enable them carry out the attack against us," Danyok told Compass.

Attacks on Christians in the town go back to 2001, when the only Christian to ever become a council chairperson, identified only as Nimfel, was murdered following an outbreak of violence between Muslims and Christians in Plateau State, central Nigeria.

In 2003, two other Christians, including one identified only as Habila, were murdered.

Danyok said he believes that God has allowed such attacks on

Christians in the town for a purpose that will glorify Him.

"We believe that God wants to strengthen us through these incidents," he said.