

Muslim Militants Murder Pastor, Church Official in Nigeria

✖ Muslim extremists from the Boko Haram sect on Tuesday shot and killed a Church of Christ in Nigeria pastor and his church secretary in Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria's Borno state.

The Rev. David Usman, 45, and church secretary Hamman Andrew were the latest casualties in an upsurge of Islamic militancy that has engulfed northern Nigeria this year, resulting in the destruction of church buildings and the killing and maiming of Christians.

The Rev. Titus Dama Pona, pastor with the Evangelical Church Winning All in Maiduguri, told Compass that Pastor Usman was shot and killed by the members of the Boko Haram near an area of Maiduguri called the Railway Quarters, where the slain pastor's church is located.

Pona said Christians in Maiduguri have become full of dread over the violence of Boko Haram, which seeks to impose *sharia* (Islamic law) on northern Nigeria.

"Christians have become the targets of these Muslim militants—we no longer feel free moving around the city, and most churches no longer carry out worship service for fear of becoming targets of these unprovoked attacks," Pona said.

Officials at COCIN's national headquarters in Jos, Plateau state, confirmed the killing of Pastor Usman. The Rev. Logan Gongchi of a COCIN congregation in Kerang, Jos, told Compass that area Christians were shocked at the news.

Gongchi said he attended Gindiri Theological College with

Pastor Usman beginning in August 2003, and that both of them were ordained into pastoral ministry on Nov. 27, 2009.

"We knew him to be very gentle, an introvert, who was always silent in the class and only spoke while answering questions from our teachers," Gongchi said. "He had a simple lifestyle and was easygoing with other students. He was very accommodating and ready at all times to withstand life's pressures—this is in addition to being very jovial."

Gongchi described Usman as "a pastor to the core because of his humility. I remember he once told me that he was not used to working with peasant farmers' working tools, like the hoe. But with time he adapted to the reality of working with these tools on the farm in the school."

Pastor Usman was excellent at counseling Christians and others while they were at the COCIN theological college, Gongchi said, adding that the pastor greatly encouraged him when he was suffering a long illness from 2005 to 2007.

"His encouraging words kept my faith alive, and the Lord saw me overcoming my ill health," he said. "So when I heard the news about his murder, I cried."

Motives

The late pastor had once complained about the activities of Boko Haram, saying that unless the Nigerian government faced up to the challenge of its attacks, the extremist group would consume the lives of innocent persons, according to Gongchi.

"Pastor Usman once commented on the activities of the Boko Haram, which he said has undermined the church not only in Maiduguri, but in Borno state," Gongchi said. "At the time, he urged us to pray for them, as they did not know how the problem will end."

Gongchi advised the Nigerian government to find a lasting solution to Boko Haram's violence, which has also claimed the

lives of moderate Muslim leaders and police.

The Railway Quarters area in Maiduguri housed the seat of Boko Haram until 2009, when Nigerian security agencies and the military demolished its headquarters and captured and killed the sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and some of his followers.

The killing of Pastor Usman marked the second attack on his church premises by the Muslim militants. The first attack came on July 29, 2009, when Boko Haram militants burned the church building and killed some members of his congregation.

On June 6, the militants bombed the St. Patrick's Catholic Church, along with other areas in Maiduguri, killing three people. In all, 14 people were killed in three explosions at the church and police stations, and authorities have arrested 14 people.

The Boko Haram name is interpreted figuratively as "against Western education," but some say it can also refer to the forbidding of the Judeo-Christian faith. They say the word "Boko" is a corruption in Hausa language for the English word "Book," referring to the Islamic scripture's description of Jews and Christians as "people of the Book," while "Haram" is a Hausa word derived from Arabic meaning, "forbidding."

Boko Haram leaders have openly declared that they want to establish an Islamic theocratic state in Nigeria, and they reject democratic institutions, which they associate with Christianity. Their bombings and suspected involvement in April's post-election violence in Nigeria were aimed at stifling democracy, which they see as a system of government built on the foundation of Christian scripture.

Christians as well as Muslims suffered many casualties after supporters of Muslim presidential candidate Muhammudu Buhari lost the April 16 federal election to Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian. Primarily Muslim rioters claimed vote fraud, although international observers praised the polls as the

fairest since 1999.

Nigeria's population of more than 158.2 million is almost evenly 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 of the population 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*.