

Nigerian Christians on High Alert After Vicious Boko Haram Attacks

This week's halt to a nation-wide strike over fuel prices came as a relief to the Open Doors team in Nigeria.

Since the week before Christmas, Open Doors workers have been swamped in efforts to confirm and address the most urgent needs of Christian believers affected directly by the latest onslaught of attacks against the church by **Boko Haram**, a militant Islamist sect demanding the rule of strict **Muslim law** in Nigeria.

Boko Haram's bold, deadly campaign during the Christmas season left Northern Nigeria reeling, causing many to say that Nigeria was tumbling into full-scale civil war. Then last week's five-day strike over the government's decision to cancel fuel subsidies spiraled into violent clashes between demonstrators and police, compounding the situation considerably. The Open Doors team has confirmed that more than 50 Christians have been killed in the violence since the beginning of January.

Despite a military presence in the Boko Haram-affected areas, coupled with the government's apparent intention to clamp down on perpetrators of violence, the Boko Haram leader's vow to "cleanse the north of Christianity" has kept the affected areas in the grip of uncertainty. A short cell phone text message circulated to warn Christians that more attacks would follow caused more fear. In a recent video posted on YouTube, the sect leader declared their attacks were "reprisals" for alleged earlier attacks by Christians against Muslims.

In reaction, the government called on Christians not to be alarmed by the threats of Boko Haram, assuring them of

protection. Many church leaders joined the president in calling for calm, urging members to remain in prayer. However, the leader of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Ayo Oritsejafor, told Christians to take appropriate action to protect themselves.

This atmosphere of fear and mistrust across the North complicates the work for Open Doors teams, which need much wisdom and discernment in their decision-making process. If staff teams are caught up in the violence themselves, this would compromise urgently needed assistance even further.

At the end of last year, some Open Doors training sessions were disrupted by **Boko Haram violence**. While a training seminar was going on in Maiduguri, 10 bomb explosions occurred in different locations of the city within three days. Two of the participants in the seminar were gunned down by Boko Haram members after returning home. One of them was a pastor of the local Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation. Despite the great shock to all the participants and the ongoing danger, they persisted to complete the training. In one instance, it was confirmed that the movements of an Open Doors relief team were being monitored by members of Boko Haram.

For now the priority of the team is to confirm data and reach the believers who are in the greatest need of assistance. From a quick scan of secular media reports, it is clear that there is a lot of contradictory information circulating. Despite the fact that the Open Doors team is very well connected with the local church in Nigeria, it poses a challenge to make sense of the plethora of information.

In prioritizing assistance, Open Doors workers have confirmed that at least some of the Christians affected by the **Christmas Day attacks** in the Abuja area have been helped by the government. Open Doors is assessing the needs of those Christians who are not receiving any assistance. Reportedly

the most urgent needs are among the large number of Christians from Potiskum and Damaturu in Yobe state who have fled to Nassarawa. Christians in Kano and Katsina say they have nowhere to go, so have stayed put, and the team is investigating their needs. Some Christians have fled across the border to the Republic of Niger, but it appears that they are being cared for to some degree.

“Please pray with me about the deteriorating situation in Nigeria,” said Open Doors USA President/CEO Dr. Carl Moeller. “The goal of Boko Haram is to spread **Sharia law** throughout Nigeria. We must storm the gates of heaven with our prayers to prevent this from happening. The millions of Christians—as well as the Open Doors team—need our support now.”

Nigeria is ranked No. 13 on the Open Doors 2012 World Watch List of 50 countries which are the worst persecutors of Christians. Last year it was ranked No. 23.