

Nigerian Christians Refuse to Cower to Boko Haram After 40 Barbaric Student Deaths

Two weeks after the barbaric murder of about 40 students at three Mubi colleges in Northern Nigeria, there are still more questions than answers. President Goodluck Jonathan's visit to relatives of the victims has failed to reveal any motive for the attacks.

What has become clear, however, is that the perpetrators singled out many Christians by name. At least one Christian female present was spared, as were Muslims who could quote Islamic verse. Muslims who could not recite verses from the Quran were also killed.

According to Mubi church leaders, a total of at least 30 people, mostly students, were killed and at least four injured in the main attack, with many others also killed close by.

Fully armed attackers invaded the Tudun Wada Wuro Patuje area at about 10 p.m. on Oct. 1, firing shots into the air. Nigerian military sources say they tried to repel them for at least an hour, but attackers still made their way to the off-campus hostels of the Federal Polytechnic State University, College of Health Technology and several private residences of Christians.

Just before midnight, the attackers called students out of their rooms and asked them for their names. Those with Christian names were shot dead or killed with knives. The bodies were left in lines outside the buildings. Students with traditionally Muslim names were told to quote Islamic scripture. "If you succeeded, you were let go," a survivor told our reporter who rushed to Mubi Hospital.

"I was asked to say my name to which I replied that I am a Christian and that my name is Elkanah," said student Elkanah Sardauna. "They threw me to the ground, and shouted 'Allahu Akbar.' I cried out to Jesus, face to the ground. They demanded that I stop calling on Jesus, but I persisted. The next moment I was shot in the hand, and then slashed with a knife at the back of my neck. They must have thought I was dead because they left."

Sardauna told our reporter from his hospital bed, "It was only God who saved me when they came to our room. We were four sharing the room and all of us had Christian names. My three roommates were killed before my eyes. They got to me last."

Manasseh, a student who survived a gunshot and severe knife injuries, shared his ordeal:

"They asked me to recant my Christian faith to spare my life. I refused. After my Muslim roommate quoted some Islamic scripture, he was told to leave the room. They said they were only after these 'infidels' who would all die that day. Then they shot me and slashed my back. This is really a picture of the great hatred for us Christians in the region."

Nigerian Christian leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the protection the government had seemed able to provide. Gideon Para-Mallam, regional secretary of the International Federation of Evangelical Students based in Jos, Plateau State, told Open Doors News that these deaths were not only tragic: "They are killing the flower of our youth, and the future of this nation."

Nigerian security officials said top-ranking **Boko Haram** members had migrated to the town after sustained military crackdowns on the group's spiritual home in neighbouring Borno state which has shariah law. In September, officials had arrested 154 members while at least 30 people had died in attacks and shootouts in Mubi, before these latest student

deaths.

Security officials said a stash of explosives and other weapons, including brand new AK47s, submachine guns and poison-tip arrows, was discovered during a raid last month on a student residence used by Boko Haram. Another police sweep had uncovered further piles of explosives and weapons. A dawn-to-dusk curfew had just been lifted as the latest violence erupted.

Although it is in northern Nigeria, Adamawa state has about 50 percent Christian population and is not one of the 12 northern states which imposes shariah law. In addition to **Boko Haram**, other radical Islamic groups and criminal gangs are active in the area; these have seized on the violent situation in the North to carry out all kinds of killings in recent times.

Various motives have been linked with this attack, which came on Nigeria's Independence Day and two days after Student Union Government elections at Mubi's Federal Polytechnic.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Mubi reported that prior to the attack, **jihadists** had circulated letters to some in the area, giving believers an ultimatum to either recant their Christian faith within two weeks or suffer fatal consequences. According to one Christian, who showed our reporter such a letter, they were warned not to disclose the threat to anyone as any leakage of the information would result in death.

CAN handed the letters over to security officials in the Adamawa state capital, Yola, prompting searches which resulted in the arms cache finds.

CAN says it believes Boko Haram was responsible, despite the Islamist group's denial. Other motives widely quoted in both Nigerian and international media linked the attacks with the student elections. The BBC reported that the Federal Polytechnic students had elected a Christian for President;

other Christians elected were among the dead. Police also carried out mass arrests of students in the days after the attacks, claiming they had found Boko Haram members among them who they accused of masterminding the attacks. However, this explanation for a motive remains unproven.

The National President of CAN, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, said "CAN vehemently condemns the barbaric act of the gunmen...We call on the Nigeria Police Force to ensure that those arrested are the real culprits, so that the innocent would not suffer for the sins of villains ...

"CAN believes in the oneness of Nigeria— in accordance with her secular status—and would, therefore, kick against any divisive actions of groups or individuals," the group said. "It is for this reason that we call on all men and women of goodwill in Nigeria to join the government to fight what may snowball into a religious or ethnic war on account of the siege (of the country). We plead with the National Assembly to speed up the bill on anti-terrorism and to introduce clauses that would discourage those with a penchant for murder, bombing and other terrorist activities".

"There could be political undertones to how this has been reported," adds Anglican Pastor Gideon Adamu, by phone from the Adamawa capital Yola. He was grieving his brother Marcus who had initially survived being shot in the shoulder, but later died of his wounds. "Religious sentiment is so precarious in Nigeria: it's very difficult for the government to step in."

Another local Mubi church leader told Open Doors News, "Despite these circumstances the church will hold on to God and will triumph; we are not going to retaliate. We want to display Christlikeness even when they hate us. We are not going to relocate from Mubi. This is where the Lord has placed us. We shall stay and fulfil our calling to the glory of our heavenly Father."