

Nigerian President Says Little Chance of Islamist Amnesty

Nigeria cannot grant amnesty to Islamist sect **Boko Haram** until its members come out from the shadows, President **Goodluck Jonathan** said on Thursday, on his first state visit to the northeastern region worst hit by the group's insurgency.

Jonathan has been criticized for not going sooner to the Yobe and Borno states, where hundreds have died since Boko Haram intensified its conflict with security forces two years ago.

"I cannot talk about amnesty with Boko Haram now until they come out and show themselves," Jonathan told reporters in the Yobe state capital Damaturu, a town regularly hit by the sect's guerrilla style bomb and gun attacks.

Nigeria's **Muslim** spiritual leader, the Sultan of Sokoto, suggested this week that members of Boko Haram should be offered an **amnesty**, similar to the one given to **militants** in the oil-producing Niger Delta in 2009.

The delta amnesty deal pulled thousands of armed youths out of the creeks and almost wiped out militant attacks on oil pipelines, which had choked off Africa's biggest oil industry. However, oil theft, piracy and kidnappings have continued.

"Some people are comparing Boko Haram with the Niger Delta but, in Niger Delta if you call them (militants), they will come out. But the Boko Haram don't and we can't grant amnesty to ghosts," Jonathan said during his one day visit.

Western governments fear that Boko Haram, or factions of it, have linked up with other groups in the region, including al-Qaeda's North African franchise.

The Nigerian group is seeking to carve out an **Islamic state** in

a country—Africa's most populous —split roughly equally between **Christians** and **Muslims**.

Attacks in northern **Nigeria** are increasingly targeting foreign interests, especially since a French-led operation last month against **Islamists** in northern Mali. Nigeria has sent hundreds of troops there to join the operation.

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