

Number of Children Abducted in Nigerian School Attack Raised to More Than 300

Gunmen abducted a total of 303 schoolchildren and 12 teachers during an attack on St. Mary's School, a Catholic institution in north-central Nigeria's Niger state, the Christian Association of Nigeria said Saturday, updating an earlier tally of 215 schoolchildren.

The tally was changed "after a verification exercise and a final census was carried out," according to a statement issued by the Most. Rev. Bulus Dauwa Yohanna, chairman of the Niger state chapter of CAN, who visited the school on Friday.

He said 88 other students "were also captured after they tried to escape" during the attack. The students were both male and female and ranged in age from 10 to 18.

The school kidnapping in Niger state's remote Papiri community happened four days after 25 schoolchildren were seized in similar circumstances in neighboring Kebbi state's Maga town, which is 170 kilometers (106 miles) away.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the abductions and authorities have said tactical squads have been deployed alongside local hunters to rescue the children.

Yohanna described as false a claim from the state government that the school had reopened for studies despite an earlier directive for schools in that part of Niger state to close temporarily due to security threats.

"We did not receive any circular. It must be an afterthought and a way to shift blame," he said, calling on families "to remain calm and prayerful."

School kidnappings have come to define insecurity in Africa's most populous nation, and armed gangs often see schools as "strategic" targets to draw more attention.

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