

Suicide Bomber Targets Churches in Kaduna, Nigeria

Churches celebrating Easter services were the targets of a suicide bomber who killed at least 38 people Sunday in Kaduna city in northern Nigeria, sources said.

Security personnel at one of the church buildings blocked the bomber, believed to belong to the Boko Haram Islamic sect, who then decided to detonate his explosives in the street at a nearby motorcycle taxi center, the sources said. Dozens of people were injured in addition to those killed.

The bombs damaged the buildings of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Good News church and the All Nations Christian Assembly, besides blasting off roofs from homes and hotels and destroying vehicles. Located on the same street, Gwari Road, are the Redeemed Christian Church of God and an Assemblies of God church.

Luka Binniyat, a Christian resident of the city, told Compass that law enforcement agents believed the ECWA Good News church was the primary target.

“Richard Markus, a detective, mentioned that the bomber’s main target was the ECWA Good News church a few meters from the scene of the bomb blast,” Binniyat said.

Binniyat said that he saw the explosion at about 9:30 a.m., and shortly afterward spoke with Markus.

“The bomber, described as dark, lean-looking and in his mid-30s, approached the ECWA Good News church at around 9:30 a.m., a plainclothes policeman informed us on Gwari road beside a roadblock set up to safeguard the church about 100 meters from its entrance,” Binniyat said.

Markus described the suicide bomber as wearing shorts and a T-shirt; he said he had an army uniform in the back of the Honda Academy car he was driving, according to Binniyat.

“He tried forcing his way past, but the security man stood in between him and the blockade,” Binniyat said. “He even pushed him a ways before some policemen manning the gate of the church rushed down to the scene.”

According to Binniyat, Markus said, “When we saw the uniform, I told him that he was a disgrace to the force. I said he should have been here to help with security instead of trying to be such a nuisance. Anyway, the police, fully armed, told him to move away. He drove away in a reckless manner.

“As we were regretting not searching his car, in about four to five minutes, we heard an earth-shaking explosion. The car that exploded was the same car that wanted to enter here.”

Residents of Kaduna who witnessed the attack told Compass some of the church buildings were affected. John Shiklam, a Kaduna-based Christian journalist, said the explosion shattered windows of church buildings and nearby establishments.

“A suicide bomber attempted to bomb the ECWA church and the All Nations Christian Assembly, both located at Gwari Road by Junction Road, but security agents repelled him,” Shiklam said. “However, on his way out the bomb exploded at Junction Road, near the Stadium Roundabout, killing the bomber and damaging some commercial vehicles at the junction.”

Blessing Audu, who witnessed the explosion, confirmed that parts of the Assemblies of God church building were also damaged.

Emergency rescue workers from the National Emergency Management Authority and the Red Cross removed bodies and evacuated the injured to four hospitals in Kaduna and Zaria. At St. Gerard’s Hospital, staff members told Compass that they

had received five bodies and 10 wounded persons. Other hospitals receiving corpses and treating the wounded were Barau Dikko Hospital, Military Hospital and the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital.

Boko Haram (literally “Forbidden Book,” translated as “Western education is forbidden”) has targeted state offices, law enforcement sites and some moderate mosques in its effort to destabilize the government and impose a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) on all of Nigeria, but Kaduna resident Stanley Yakubu said that Christians are one of its main targets.

“The truth is that there is a deliberate effort to silence or eliminate the Christians in the north,” he said. “Otherwise, why have churches suddenly become the target of suicide bombers? Are there no mosques and Islamic centers in the north? Let the world accept the fact that there is no ‘Boko Haram,’ but ‘Christianity Haram.’”

Another resident, Malachy Gwatiyap, told Compass that attacks on Christians must stop. The bomber detonated the bomb in order to kill Christians disembarking from motorcycle taxis heading to their churches, he said.

“It appears from this heinous incident that Boko Haram is changing tactics – if they can’t get Christians in the churches, it would still serve their purpose to get them either on their way to or from church,” he said. “Shall we continue to suffer in silence? Shall we continue to be the sacrificial lambs on the altar of bigotry of these Islamists? We have suffered enough.”