

Suicide Bombers Attack Worship Service in Jos, Nigeria

Two suicide bombers from the **Boko Haram** Islamist sect drove a car laden with bombs into the **worship service** of a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation here this morning, killing at least one Christian girl and injuring dozens of other church members, sources said.

A man claiming to be a spokesman for Boko Haram reportedly claimed responsibility for the blast. The two **suicide bombers** broke through a security barrier at the gate of the church building at 7:20 a.m., a church leader said.

“When the bombs went off, I saw the dead body of one girl and four other members of our church who were injured,” said Yakubu Dutse, director of finance at COCIN headquarters, which is located in the same building.

Dutse said one of the bombers was shot dead and one was injured by soldiers posted as security guards before the bombs went off, killing the second assailant as well.

“When they were stopped at the gate of the church, they refused to stop, hence the soldiers posted to the church shot at the car,” he said.

Church member Felix Apollos rushed to the scene of the attack minutes after the bombs went off; he told Compass that he saw the bodies of five people killed in the attack, but the identities of the dead were yet to be confirmed at press time. At least 38 people were reportedly injured in the blast.

“I saw some Red Cross personnel moving both the dead and the injured into ambulances,” Apollos said. “I saw five dead

bodies and about seven injured Christians being moved into vehicles. But then the number of the injured may be higher than this, as there were already some injured that were taken to the hospital before I got here.”

Apollos said members of a security force manning the church gate tried to stop the assailants, but soldiers also guarding the church ordered them to allow the bombers onto the premises.

“Just when the bombers got onto the church premises, they crashed into the church building,” Apollos told Compass.

The COCIN church holds two worship services on Sunday mornings, one at 7 and one at 10. The second service was cancelled, as were most church services throughout Jos.

The car used in the attack was blown to pieces, and seven other cars were also destroyed.

Boko Haram, the name given to the **Islamic extremist group** officially called Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad—“The People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad” – seeks to impose a strict version of shariah (**Islamic law**) on Nigeria. The name Boko Haram translates loosely as “Western education is forbidden.”

Nigeria’s population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who make up 51.3 percent of the population and live mainly in the south, and Muslims, who account for 45 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. The percentages may be less, however, as those practicing indigenous religions may be as high as 10 percent of the total population, according to *Operation World*.

Jos, often described as a religious fault line between the north and the south, has been the site of numerous large-scale and isolated incidents of violence containing a religious component.

COCIN is one of the largest evangelical Christian denominations in Nigeria, with a large concentration in northern Nigeria. COCIN was established in Nigeria in 1904 by the Sudan United Mission by the leadership of Dr. Karl Kunn.

A number of COCIN congregations and other churches have come under attack by **Boko Haram** recently in northern Nigeria. In Borno state last year, the Rev. David Usman of the COCIN church in Maiduguri was murdered by Boko Haram. The denomination's church buildings in Geidam, Damaturu, and Potiskum, all in Yobe state, also have been bombed.

COCIN church members have also been attacked in Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro Local Government Areas of Bauchi state. Early morning attacks in Tafawa Balewa, on Jan. 22 left at least seven Christians dead and a church building destroyed. The attack on the Evangelical Church Winning All Church 2, residents of Tafawa Balewa said, was carried out by area Islamic extremists alongside members of the Boko Haram sect, with the church building and surrounding houses bombed.

Suspected Islamic extremists detonated a bomb outside a church building in Suleja, Niger state, on Feb. 19, two months after Boko Haram Islamists killed 44 Christians and blinded seven in a church bombing in nearby Madalla. The Feb. 19 blast injured at five Christians.