

Survivors Desperately Seek Loved Ones in Jos, Nigeria Blast

One man rendered a widower by the **Islamist suicide bombing** at a Catholic church on March 11 discovered his wife had been killed only after finding her severed hand with her wedding ring on it.

Another could identify his wife only by the clothing left on her remains.

Both women, 52-year-old Rose Dominic Dung Tari, and 50-year-old Roseline Kumbo Pam, had given birth to five children; the two victims were neighbors, their homes separated only by an apartment between them. They were two of the nine Christians confirmed killed—including two Boy Scouts, ages 8 and 16, helping security personnel keep the assailants outside the church compound gate—in the bombing by Islamic extremists reportedly from the Boko Haram sect.

Pam's husband, Sunday Davou Pam, told Compass that before leaving for the service at St. Finbarr's Catholic Church, his wife was preoccupied with preparations for her brother's wedding that morning and helping him settle with his bride-to-be.

"I was in a meeting at the back of the church in the men's fellowship meeting when the blast went off," Pam said. "And when we heard a loud explosion, we all rushed to the front of the church, only to find the dead bodies of many of our members lying scattered across the street. There were also many injured who were crying for help."

His wife, however, was nowhere to be found. He tried calling her cell phone, but it went unanswered, he said.

"I phoned her four times and still got no response," Pam said. "My friend, David Dung, was also searching for his wife, Regina, and eventually found her dead body, but my wife was nowhere to be found."

The **suicide bombers** had detonated the explosives after security personnel stopped them at the gate of the church compound, killing mainly people outside the sanctuary—some instantly, and others later in hospitals, including an 8-year-old boy who succumbed to his injuries at 1 a.m. today, according to church sources. After a desperate search, Pam finally found his wife's remains.

"I saw a dead body with no arms, and the lower part of the body was also blown off to pieces," he said. "I also saw a hand that had a ring on its finger. The hand was that of my wife. That is how I found the partial part of her body and collected it for burial."

Pam said his wife was a leader of the women's fellowship in the parish and community. They had been married for 32 years.

Searching Morgues

Dominic Dung Tari told Compass that his wife, Rose, had only one thing on her mind before leaving for church that morning – money for the Sunday service offering. He was staying home ill with a fever, and she asked him for money.

"I could not give her the money she requested because I did not have a dime on me," Tari said. "I asked our son whether he could spare us some little amount to enable their mother to have something to give as offering in the church, but he too had only 500 naira. So, she left for the church without having anything to offer as offering."

Still at home at the time of the blast, Tari rushed out when he heard the explosion. Growing more anxious each minute that his wife did not call him, shaken, he ran to the church site. Unable to find her, he returned home.

“Just when I returned to my house, my mobile phone rang and I quickly grappled with it to receive the call, but then it was not from my wife,” he said. “I was told there is a corpse among the dead that resembles my wife. I raced back again to the church.”

Emergency rescue workers, however, had already taken the body along with others to the morgue, he said. He set out on the task of visiting morgues.

“I went ‘round the various hospitals – JUTH [Jos University Teaching Hospital], Plateau Specialist Hospital, and the Air Force Military Hospital – in all these hospitals, I could still not find my wife’s corpse,” Tari said.

With the help of family members, her remains were finally located at the Plateau State Specialist Hospital morgue, he said.

“The corpse had no head, no legs and was in pieces,” he said. “We only identified those pieces of human flesh as hers because of the clothes she wore.”

Her remains were buried yesterday at her family’s house.

“My wife was a devout Christian,” Tari said. “She was a member of the global ministries team and a very prayerful woman. To us, she was a mother, a sister, and a wife I so much loved.”

He said the attacks on Christians in Nigeria amount to a war waged by Muslim extremists against Christians. Sunday’s attack followed a Feb. 26 bomb blast outside the church walls of a Church of Christ in Nigeria service that killed at least three Christians.

“I am an ex-service man [retired military]—I know what a war is,” he said. “What is happening in Nigeria today is a war against the church. We need to fight back spiritually, as this is the only way we as Christians can survive it.”

Death Toll

Among those killed in the in the blast, church sources said, was Tari Benjamin, who would have been 9 years old on March 26. Emmanuel David, 16, who like Tari was a Boy Scout helping to secure the church compound, was also killed in the blast.

Tari's mother, Rose Benjamin, told Compass that her son died this morning at about 1 a.m. in the Intensive Care Unit of Jos University Teaching Hospital from burns from the bomb attack.

Besides the two boys and Rose Dominic Dung Tari, Roseline Kumbo Pam, and Regina David Dung, other church members killed in the blast were Emmanuel Kanke, Henry Chuwang, Matthew Dalyop and Ahmadu Choji.

Rose Benjamin said her 8-year-old son had a premonition he was about to die.

"He returned to the house after attending the Sunday school class, and then while placing his hands on my shoulders, told me he was returning to the church for his last duty," she said. "I did not understand what he meant by that – not until he died this morning did his last moment with me that Sunday morning come to memory."

Tari, the second of three children and known to be a hard-working and intelligent pupil at school, had left for church wearing his Boys Scout uniform and joined other Scouts, she said.

"They were working alongside security men, screening worshippers before allowing them entry into the church, before the suicide bombers crashed into them when they refused to allow them into the church," she said.

While church member accounts varied as to whether there were two or three bombers in the car, they agreed that one of them was disguised as a woman, wearing a wig.

Several members of the church were still missing—not located among the wounded in hospitals or among the dead in morgues. Their relatives said they fear they may have been obliterated when the bombs went off; emergency rescue workers have collected bags of human body parts.

The body of 16-year-old Emmanuel David, an orphan whose father died in 2007, was found under debris of the church gate, said his uncle, Raphael Elisha Davou, 60.

“He and others refused to allow the bombers into the church premises,” Davou said. “Their refusal to allow the bombers into the church forced the bombers to detonate the bomb outside the church gate. It was the impact of the explosion that crashed the car into the gate and killed the youths and other security men with them. They died to save many other members of the church.”

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 *sharia* (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*.

Subsequent Violence

Apart from the bombing deaths, confusion is growing about subsequent violence.

While some state health and police sources have reported unconfirmed “reprisal” attacks against Muslims, witnesses have

reported additional deaths of Christians at the hands of military personnel. Compass sources said soldiers killed four Christians when youths confronted them, asking them to leave the city because they had allowed suicide bombers to carry out attacks on churches.

The Jos-based Stefanos Foundation reported soldiers arriving at the church as people were searching for loved ones and opening fire on the crowd, killing several. Local press reported Special Task Force soldiers rushing to the scene of the blast and trying to control protestors by opening fire. Plateau state police spokesman Samuel Dabai reportedly said at least 10 people were killed and at least 10 others injured from the military action.

When Compass visited the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) and the Plateau State Specialist Hospital yesterday, authorities confirmed 17 corpses in their morgues. Dr. Ishaya Pam, chief medical director at JUTH, said the hospital had received seven bodies and "about 12" injured persons, while Dr. Bitrus Matawal, medical director of Plateau Specialist Hospital, said there were 10 corpses in the hospital's morgue brought from the church and seven injured Christians receiving treatment.

The Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, archbishop of the Catholic Diocese of Jos, appealed for calm on the part of Christians, saying God was not unaware of their suffering.

"We have a faith that preaches the respect of the sanctity of the human life," Kaigama said. "We have a faith and have the ability to reason. So, we must not behave like those who believe they are serving God by killing others."