

Tensions High in Nigeria after Christians Killed in Bombings

Tensions continued to mount in the Christian community in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state in northern Nigeria, following the killing of a Baptist pastor and five other Christians on Christmas Eve.

The Rev. Bulus Marwa and the other Christians were killed in the Dec. 24 attacks on Victory Baptist Church in Alemderi and a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation in Sinimari by the outlawed Islamic Boko Haram sect opposed to Western education.

Those killed at the Baptist church, which was set ablaze, included choir members Philip Luka, 22, and Paul Mathew, 21, as well as 50-year-old Christopher Balami and Yohana Adamu. Philip Sopso, a 60-year-old a security guard, was killed at the COCIN church while 25 other persons were said to have been injured during the serial attacks by the Islamic group.

"It is sad that when Christians were supposed to be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, some people, out of wickedness, would come to perpetrate such evil," said Borno State Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria the Rev. Yuguda Ndirmva.

The Boko Haram members reportedly first stormed the COCIN church in two vehicles and detonated bombs that shattered the gate of the worship center and killed the security guard.

Many Christians have taken refuge to avoid further attacks as soldiers and police keep watch at churches and other strategic locations in the state.

Danjuma Akawu, who survived the attack on the Baptist church, said "they hacked the two choir members using knives and petrol bomb before heading to the pastor's residence, where he was killed."

Borno Gov. Ali Modu Sheriff said he had alerted police to the possibility of an attack on churches during Christmas.

"It is very unfortunate and sad for the Christian community to be attacked and people killed without any genuine cause," Sheriff said.

Speaking during a visit to the Baptist church on Saturday (Dec. 25), the governor noted that the attack on the Christian community was an attempt by Boko Haram to create conflict between Christians and Muslims in the state. Several Boko Haram bomb blasts in Christian areas of Jos on Dec. 24 that killed scores of people were said to be an attempt to create the same inter-religious conflict.

Borno state, in northeastern Nigeria, is largely populated by Muslims who have disowned some activities of Boko Haram as contrary to Islam.

Police Commissioner Mohammed Abubakar admitted a security lapse on the part of his divisional police officers, whom he said had been told to watch out for Boko Haram members.

The activities of the Islamic extremist Boko Haram, whose names means "a Western education is sin," were crushed by police in 2009 with the arrest of many of its members and the killing of its leader.

In retaliation, the group had killed policemen and was recently responsible for a prison break to set free its members in the Borno state capital.

Worried about the safety of Christians in Borno state, the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pastor Ayo

Oritsejafor, asked the federal government to curb the growing trend of terrorism in parts of the country.

“We can no longer allow this group of disgruntled elements to get away with these acts of terrorism in Nigeria,” he said.

The general superintendent of Deeper Life Bible Church, Pastor William Kumuyi, demanded the arrest and prosecution of the Boko Haram members and others to serve as a deterrent.

“A situation in which feuds easily lead to the burning of churches and the endless killings of church ministers and innocent citizens is an abhorrent trend which must not be allowed to continue,” Pastor Kumuyi said. “The initiative rests on the doorsteps of the security agencies to bring this unfortunate trend to an end.”