

Tony Blair Aims to Help End Islamic Terror in Nigeria

Amidst continuing attacks on Churches and Christian communities in Northern Nigeria, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair has launched a faith-based program to promote religious tolerance in the country.

Eleven people were killed and 30 others injured in two successive suicide attacks on Sunday, Nov. 25 at St Andrews Protestant Church located in the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, in Jaji near Kaduna. Sunday's attack which is believed to have been carried out by the **Boko Haram** Islamist group occurred after the Church service, when some leaders were holding a meeting.

Many members who rushed back to the Church after the first explosion were caught in the second explosion resulting in the large number of casualties.

"There were twin suicide bombings today at the St. Andrew Military Protestant Church, Jaji Military Cantonment at 1205hrs and 1215hrs. A bus first ran into the church and exploded about five minutes after the service, while a Toyota Camry parked outside the church detonated 10 minutes later," the military spokesman, Major General Bola Koleoso said in a text message to newsmen.

Many Nigerians are shocked by Sunday's bombing, wondering how the attackers could have entered the barracks, which houses Nigeria's elite military training center, without some inside help.

Today, Monday 26th saw 'a large number of gunmen' attack the Special Anti-Robbery Squad Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital. Suspected robbers and militants from the **Boko Haram** Islamist group are often held there.

In the face of such violence, Blair's program, endorsed by Nigerian faith leaders, the Archbishop designate of Canterbury, Bishop Justin Welby and Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammed of Jordan, is to be implemented by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and seeks to ensure a truce between Christians and Muslim communities.

"My foundation and I are deeply committed to addressing the challenges of reconciliation in Nigeria. Understanding and respecting different faiths is central to securing sustainable peace.

"I hope that over the coming months the work my foundation will do will go towards healing the rifts and divisions amongst faiths in the country, bringing unity and peaceful co-existence," Blair stated in a statement released on Friday, Nov. 23 during the launch of the program in Abuja.

Bishop Welby, who has visited Nigeria over 70 times, first as an oil executive and later as the archbishop's special envoy to Nigeria, said he was challenged and excited by the programme, and noted that it offers a contribution to the hope for peace in the country.

The President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsajafor said Blair's move was crucial to him, as he believes in progressive dialogue for which goals and timelines can be set.

The spiritual leader of Nigeria's Muslims, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar also noted that there is a need for religious groups to understand one another. "We need education to know what our religions teach us. We need to love one another like we love ourselves," Abubakar stated.

Meanwhile, the Police Command in Kano on Friday, Nov. 23 confirmed that seven Churches were burnt during a religious clash in Bichi Town on Thursday, Nov. 22, while a retired pastor, Reverend Elisha Kabura of the Church of Christ in

Nations (COCIN) was on November 18 killed in Maiduguri, capital of Borno State while getting ready to go to Church with his family.

In Ibbi town in Taraba State, Christians and Muslims also clashed on Nov. 18 over a security check point erected by Christians on Sunday to prevent attacks during Church services.

The clash followed attempts by Muslim youths to remove the barricade based on the directive of a Muslim leader. Four people were confirmed killed by the police, while many houses and shops were burnt.