

Two Churches Targeted in Bomb Attack in Nigeria

Suspected **Islamic extremists** detonated a bomb outside a church building here on Feb. 19, two months after **Boko Haram** Islamists killed 44 Christians and blinded seven in a **church bombing** in nearby Madalla.

Sunday's blast in Suleja, in front of Christ Embassy church during their morning **worship**, injured five people, one seriously, sources said. The bomb, planted in a parked car, was left by suspected members of Boko Haram, which seeks to impose *Shariah* (Islamic law) throughout Nigeria, and authorities arrested some members of the sect the same day.

Triumphant Ministries International Church is also near the site of the explosion. Peter Osema, a search-and-rescue worker with Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency, told Compass that the bomb was likely meant to affect both churches, and indeed Compass learned that at least one of those injured belongs to the Triumph Ministries church.

"We found five vehicles destroyed, and we believe that the bomb was targeted at these two churches here," Osema said.

Collins Anyobi, a member of the Triumphant Ministries International Church, told Compass that his teenage son, Confidence Anyobi, was injured in the blast.

"Confidence was injured by flying pieces of glass from car windshields when the bomb exploded near our church," he said.

Uyi Idugboe, pastor at Christ Embassy church in Suleja, told Compass that an unidentified person drove a Honda car with registration number Abuja 383 ABC into the parking lot and hurried away in another vehicle as church members were trying to find out who he was.

"This person's sudden running away in another vehicle raised suspicion," Idugboe said. 'Nobody suspected him when he was parking the car, but when our members saw him leave hastily, they became suspicious about the parked car."

The blast occurred a few minutes after the **worship service** began at 10 a.m., he said.

"When my members called my attention to the car, I asked all members to remain in the church, and we then phoned security agents alerting them about the car, but before they got here, the bomb exploded," he said.

Besides Confidence Anyobi, also injured in the blast were Christians Chike Emefor, Anthony Nweke and Maureen Kenneth; the fifth victim was not identified at press time.

In addition to the two churches on Morocco Road in Suleja, a Christian-owned hotel, Crisia Hotels, is located on the same street.

If the bomb was planted by Boko Haram, it would be the sixth attack by the **Islamic extremist** sect in Suleja, including violence against the All Christian Fellowship Mission church.

A week before Sunday's attack, Dr. Ola Makinde, prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, had called on Nigerian church leaders to adopt urgent security measures.

"Prayer alone is not enough to tackle the menace of Boko Haram," Makinde said at his church's synod in Lagos. "We should not only pray but watch."

Niger State Commissioner of Police Ibrahim Maishanu said yesterday that five members of the Boko Haram sect had been arrested in connection with Sunday's attack. He said police were able to arrest the Boko Haram members the afternoon of the attack following information provided to authorities.

Madalla Church Blast

At St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, where the casualty figure has varied the past few months as victims were sought and identified at various hospitals, the Rev. Isaac Achi said Feb. 20 that 44 church members were killed in the Christmas Day blast.

"Of the 127 victims, we lost 44, and of the injured seven lost their sight," he said. "Four are still at Gwagwalada Specialist Hospital, and eight at the National Hospital, Abuja. Others have been referred to Kano, Zaria, Lagos and Enugu hospitals."

Achi lamented that what was supposed to be a day of joy for Christians was turned into one of mourning. St. Theresa's has about 2,400 members spread among three worship services each Sunday.

Security agencies are still investigating the attack, and several Boko Haram members have been arrested in connection with it. The State Security Service has reportedly re-arrested the alleged mastermind of the Christmas bombing, Kabiru Abubakar Dikko Sokoto, and is seeking a former soldier in the Nigerian Army, Habibu Bama. The agency has also reportedly arrested Mohammed Aliyu and is trying to find another alleged mastermind of the attack, Bashiru Madalla.

In response to continuing attacks in northern Nigeria, president Goodluck Jonathan on Dec. 31 declared a state of emergency in some areas, deploying the military and other security agencies.