

Niger attack: Gunmen kill one, set church, police station ablaze

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Illustration image: Gunmen

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Gunmen suspected to be bandits have struck again in Niger State, killing one person, abducting five others, and setting ablaze a church building and a police station in Agwara Local Government Area.

The attack affected the United Missionary Church of Africa in Agwara, which was set on fire, while the police station in the area was also torched.

PUNCH Metro gathered that the suspected bandits set the church ablaze at about 6 a.m. before moving to Sokonba, a neighbouring village that shares a border with Kabe, which was recently attacked. The attackers reportedly looted

foodstuffs and other valuables before killing an elderly woman in Kabe town and abducting five residents.

Speaking on Sunday morning, the son of the late Emir, Murtala Dantoro, said the repeated attacks had turned the once-peaceful communities into zones of fear and uncertainty.

He said, “Innocent lives are being lost, farmers are abandoning their farmlands, economic activities have collapsed, and families are forced to flee their homes in search of safety.

“These attacks are not isolated incidents; they are persistent and escalating. The absence of a permanent and well-equipped military formation in Agwara has left the people vulnerable and exposed.

“The state and federal governments must come to our aid urgently before these suspected bandits chase us out of our homeland.”

Dantoro added that the security vacuum created by the lack of military presence had emboldened criminals, who now operate with little or no resistance, worsening the humanitarian and economic situation in the area.

PUNCH Metro reports that Agwara has suffered several attacks in recent times and remains a strategic part of Niger State.

Its continued neglect, residents told our correspondent, poses a serious risk not only to the local population but also to neighbouring communities.

Similarly, the Catholic Bishop of Kontagora Diocese and Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Niger State, Most Rev. Bulus Yohanna, on Sunday appealed to the Federal Government, the Nigerian Army and other relevant security agencies to establish a permanent military formation in Agwara.

He said, “This is not a luxury; it is a necessity. A visible and stationed military presence will deter criminal activities, restore confidence among residents, enable displaced persons to return home, and allow farmers to safely return to their farms.

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“Enough is enough. The people of Agwara deserve peace, protection and the right to live without fear. Security is the foundation of development, and without it, no meaningful progress can be achieved.

“Agwara deserves peace and development. The time to act is now. We are deeply concerned about the security situation and wonder why there has been no permanent solution.

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“These suspected bandits now move freely without challenge. Presently, the rule of law no longer functions effectively in Borgu and its surrounding axis, as criminals operate freely both day and night.”

The bishop further alleged that the suspected bandits were gradually turning the once-peaceful Borgu Emirate into what he described as a “terrorist enclave” by killing residents, forcing many to flee and coercing others into becoming informants.

Reacting to the attack, the spokesperson for the Niger State Police Command, Wasiu Abiodun, said police operatives engaged the attackers, who later used dynamite to set the police station ablaze.

He said, “On February 1, 2026, at about 3:40 a.m., armed bandits invaded the Agwara community and attacked the police station, where they were engaged by the tactical team on the ground. The attackers later overpowered the team and used suspected dynamite to set the station on fire.

“The bandits subsequently moved to the UMC church in the community, burnt part of the building, proceeded to other areas and abducted about five persons whose identities are yet to be ascertained. Monitoring continues.”

Niger State, in north-central Nigeria, has in recent times been grappling with a surge in banditry and violent attacks by armed criminal groups.

In November 2025, bandits kidnapped over 300 students and 12 teachers from St Mary's School in Papiri. This was followed by a deadly wave of attacks from late December 2025 into early January 2026.

On January 3, heavily armed bandits riding motorcycles killed 42 men, abducted women and children in Kasuwan Daji village in Agwara Local Government Area, and set the market and several homes on fire.

These incidents underscore the persistent security challenges confronting the state.