



AFRICA

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Jos bombing: Politicians 'fuel Nigeria unrest'

Nigerian faith leaders have accused politicians of fuelling a recent upsurge in sectarian violence in which 80 people have died.

In a joint news conference, Muslim and Christian leaders said politicians were using religion to whip up trouble around the city of Jos.

Bombs exploded in several areas of Jos on Christmas Eve, and Christian and Muslim youths clashed two days later.

Nigerians are due to hold national and local elections in April.

Local politicians are frequently accused of trying to exploit communal tensions for their gain.

At Tuesday's news conference, Christian Association of Nigeria head Ayo Oritsejafor, and Nigerian Muslims' spiritual leader Sultan Mohammadu Sa'ad Abubakar made a joint statement criticising politicians.

Mr Oritsejafor said some politicians "know the weaknesses of the people".

"They know how to manipulate their beliefs and they know the... parts of the country where people react very easily," he said.

"Some of them are creating these kind of problems to make Nigeria ungovernable."

Islamist claims

The sultan accused politicians of a "failure of leadership".

"If the government in that area is... purposeful enough... they will find answers to these problems," he said.

Officials from Nigeria's emergency management agency (Nema) said at least 80 people had died and more than 190 had been injured in the recent outbreak of violence around Jos.

A radical Islamist sect reportedly said they carried out the Christmas Eve bombings.

A website apparently belonging to the Boko Haram group, which staged an uprising in the city of north-eastern city of Maiduguri in 2008, said it launched the attacks to "start avenging the atrocities committed against Muslims".

But police chief Abdulrahman Akano cast doubt on the claims, saying it was not Boko Haram's usual method.

"Anybody can post anything on the internet," he told the AFP news agency.

Boko Haram members who took part in the 2008 uprising were armed mostly with sticks and home-made rifles.

Security forces put down the uprising and killed about 800 people, including the group's leader.

Sultan Mohammedu also played down the Boko Haram link and called on all Nigerians "not to succumb to the moves and practices of the few destructive elements that really don't want peace in this country".

The city of Jos lies in Nigeria's volatile Middle Belt - between the mainly Muslim north and largely Christian south.

Jos has been blighted by sectarian violence over the past decade, with deadly riots in 2001, 2008 and this year.

The clashes usually pit Muslims against Christians, but analysts say the underlying issues are political and economic.

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