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BOMB BLAST KILLS 40 CORPS MEMBERS

SATURDAY, 09 APRIL 2011 00:00 NIGERIAN COMPASS HITS: 1623



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*As explosion rocks INEC's Suleja office

*Jonathan orders IG to beef up security

*Perpetrators are cowards, says Jega



Barely one month after a bomb exploded at [Suleja, Niger State](#), killing over a [dozen people](#), a [fresh one](#) went off in the same town yesterday at the branch office of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC).

It claimed no fewer than [40 lives](#), [most of them](#) members of the National Youth Service Corps ([NYSC](#)) deployed for the elections which begin today.

In his Otuoke, Bayelsa State country home, President Goodluck Jonathan deplored the incident and [ordered the Inspector General of Police](#) to beef up security around election materials and electoral officers across the country.

INEC chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, also condemned the act by people he referred to as “cowards” and “mindless criminals” while urging Nigerians not to be deterred by the development. He urged the people to come out en masse today and vote for the candidates.

It was learnt that the corps members had crowded a notice board to check their names and places of assignment for today's elections. The bomb was believed to have been deliberately planted close to the notice board for maximum damage.

Human flesh littered the premises as people ran helter skelter.

The bomb blast, according to an eye-witness account, occurred at about 5pm while electoral officials and ad-hoc staff were busy putting finishing touches to preparations for today's National Assembly elections.

Pandemonium broke out in the town soon after the blast which left scores of human bodies lying lifeless inside the premises of the Suleja office of INEC.

The residents ran in different directions as fear of another blast filled the air.

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Unconfirmed report has it that youth corps members deployed to the branch office of the electoral body topped the fairly long list of casualties.

Although it was still unclear who or what party was behind the latest blast, accusing fingers were pointed in the direction of the opposition Congress for Popular Change (CPC) when the first incident occurred, leading to the arrest and detention of one Hon. Lado.

The state branch of the party denied involvement in the incident which killed scores of PDP supporters and a body of student spectators at the rally ground where the bomb went off.

The state Governor, Dr Babangida Aliyu had linked the earlier explosion in Suleja to a gang of terrorists lurking around the once peaceful town for a mission that still remained unclear.

President Jonathan ordered the nation's security agencies to take immediate steps to beef up security at all INEC premises across the country.

A statement by his spokesman, Ima Niboro, last night, disclosed that the President "totally" condemned the mindless bomb attack. It read in part: "The President's deepest sympathies go to the families of these patriotic youth and he wishes to assure them that the Federal Government will do everything possible

to bring their murderers to justice."

The statement added: "President Jonathan urges all INEC officials engaged in the conduct of the general elections which begin tomorrow (today) not to be discouraged or daunted by the dastardly attack on their colleagues in Suleja, but to go about their duties with the assurance that the Federal Government will take immediate action to strengthen security measures already put in place to ensure their safety in all parts of the country.

"He also urges all eligible Nigerians to resist all attempts to deter them from participating in the elections through violence designed to incite fear, and to put the perpetrators of electoral violence to shame by turning out en masse to vote for candidates of their choice tomorrow (today)."

The spokesman of Governor Aliyu, Muhammed Kuta, last night described the act as barbaric, saying that security agencies were working hard to unmask the culprits. He pledged the government's readiness to compensate all victims and disclosed that Governor Aliyu had immediately despatched its officials to Suleja.

Professor Attahiru Jega sympathised with the victims but told reporters at a press briefing last night that he could not give the casualty figure. He said that the management of INEC would meet to determine whether election would hold in Niger today or not and inform the country this morning. Jega also urged Nigerians not to be deterred by the rising incidence of violence. He said: "Our deep sympathies go to the families of these young Nigerians who lost their lives or were injured. They have made enormous sacrifice in the service of their fatherland..

All Nigerians must remain resolved not to allow the perpetrators of this dastardly act to achieve their aim of scuttling the aspiration of Nigerians for free, fair, peaceful and credible elections."

He disclosed that INEC was working closely with security agencies "to ensure that all those behind this mindless incident are tracked down and brought to justice very soon."

Reviewing the incident, he said: "It is with a heavy heart and sorrow that we received the news this evening of an explosion that occurred at the INEC local government office in Suleja, Niger State. The unfortunate incident occurred when the commission was deploying personnel and materials in preparation for tomorrow's National Assembly elections. We condemn this cowardly and dastardly action."