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Nigeria: A Hideous and Despicable Act

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EDITORIAL

The bomb attack targeted at the St. Theresa's Catholic Church at Madallah, on the outskirts of the Federal capital Territory on Christmas Day, and the almost simultaneous attack on a church in Jos, Plateau State and on the state headquarters of the State Security Service at Damaturu, Yobe State, should worry every peace-loving Nigeria. These were heinous, reprehensible, despicable, shameful and unspeakable acts and therefore condemnable.

An estimated 40 people were killed and scores of others injured in the attacks, which were timed to inflict the maximum number of casualties as Christmas services were rounding off in churches across the country.

A spokesman who said he was speaking on behalf of the Boko Haram sect, said the group was responsible for the outrageous attacks. The group in the past year had carried out a bloody campaign of shootings and bombings, mainly in Maiduguri and other North Eastern cities, and also in Abuja. According to spokesman, the attacks were meant to avenge an attack on Muslim worshippers at a mosque on the outskirts of Jos during the last Eid el-Fitr, and also as part of its wider campaign to institute Islamic rule in Nigeria.

However, from the reaction that greeted the attacks, the larger Muslim community in Nigeria was as shocked and outraged as anyone else by this callous targeting of places of worship, which are highly respected in Islam. The Islamic religion enjoins Muslims to respect the places of worship of people of other faiths, not only because they are worshiping God in there, but also on the practical ground that if you respect other people's sacred places, they will in turn respect your own sacred places.

It is true, sadly, that this fundamental religious teaching of respect and mutual co-existence has been lost on many youths, Muslim as well as well as Christian in many parts of Nigeria, and they have over the years made churches and mosques the first targets during any communal disturbances.

Still, last Sunday's events at Madallah and, to some extent, that of Jos, were the worst outrage of their kind in the history of this country. Clearly, it was calculated to set this country's two main religious communities on a collision course in order to destroy this country in pursuit of some narrow agenda. It is incumbent on all Nigerians and the authorities that this devilish wish must be made to fail.

All the major Muslim community leaders and organizations in Nigeria, from Sultan Muhammadu Sa'ad, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, to the Jama'atu Nasril Islam and many other leading Muslim clerics, have condemned the bombings in no uncertain terms. They have also disowned the bombers and distanced the Muslim community from these acts. They have emphasized that the Muslim community is not at war with the Christian community and has no desire, wish or interest in any inter-religious conflict.

It is now incumbent upon the government and the security agencies to do their part, by fishing out the culprits behind the dastardly acts and to bring to an end once and for all the spectre of sectarian insecurity and violence that has hung over this country in the last two years. Besides the Boko Haram's claims, it is important to verify them and to find out if there are other persons or groups behind these heinous crimes.

The Federal Government has voted nearly a trillion naira in the 2012 budget for security; but it must be reminded that money is not the most important thing in the fight against this scourge. Exemplary leadership, sharp focus, good governance as well as the deployment of all political and diplomatic resources and the mobilization of all community stakeholders, are part of what is required in this struggle to re-establish peace and security in Nigeria.

We condole with all Nigerians, particularly with the victims of this outrage and the families

that lost loved ones, and urge them to take heart that their losses would serve the larger good of once more bringing peace, security and peaceful co-existence among the diverse communities of Nigeria. In order to attain that goal, the authorities should take prompt action in providing some succour to those who suffered injuries and to ameliorate the suffering of those who lost loved ones and property in the unfortunate attacks.

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