

DAILY NATION

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780 killed in Nigeria clashes, says Red Cross

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Nigeria military personnel clash with militant youths in Onitsha, southeastern Nigeria. Photo/REUTERS

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MAIDUGURI, Nigeria, Sunday

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Hundreds of bodies in streets after Nigeria unrest

More than 700 people were killed during a five-day uprising by a radical Islamic sect in northern Nigeria and the search for bodies is continuing, Red Cross and defence officials said today.

Gunbattles raged for days last week as the security forces fought to put down the uprising by members of Boko Haram, a militant movement which wants sharia (Islamic law) to be imposed more widely in

Africa's most populous nation.

Violence flared in several states but Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state where sect leader Mohammed Yusuf had his base, saw the heaviest fighting.

End to the uprising

Yusuf, 39, was shot in police detention in Maiduguri on Thursday and the authorities are hoping his killing will bring an end to the uprising.

Hundreds of people gathered on Friday to see Yusuf's corpse, laid on the ground in front of Maiduguri police headquarters alongside the bodies of other presumed Boko Haram members.

Officials have said Yusuf died while trying to escape but human rights groups have condemned what they said looked like an execution-style killing.

"From our findings, the toll is 780 so far ... A joint operation team has been tasked to search for remaining dead bodies all over the town," Aliyu Maikano, northeastern disaster management officer for the Nigerian Red Cross, told Reuters.

State government and Health Ministry workers have been piling corpses, some swollen after lying in the streets for days, onto open trucks.

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“Over 700 dead bodies were given mass burial in Maiduguri town alone. Most of the bodies were buried in Yusuf’s compound that used to be their headquarters,” a senior defence official in the capital Abuja told Reuters.

The troubles began last Sunday in Bauchi state, some 400 km southwest of Maiduguri, when members of the group — loosely modelled on the Taliban in Afghanistan — were arrested on suspicion of plotting to attack a police station.

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