



# Gunmen kidnap French national in northern Nigeria

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A group of some 30 gunmen have kidnapped a French national in northern Nigeria after storming a residence where expatriate workers were staying and killing two people, Katsina state police say.

A group of 30 gunmen who stormed a residence in northern Nigeria where expatriate workers were staying kidnapped a French citizen after killing two people, police said Thursday.

"I can confirm the abduction of a French national," the Katsina state police chief, Abdullahi Magaji, told AFP of the incident late Wednesday.

"The kidnappers numbering about 30 stormed the residence where the engineers of (French company) Vergnet were staying," he said, adding that a security guard and a neighbour were shot dead in the attack.

The abducted engineer had just returned from a trip outside Nigeria, he added.

Vergnet, a company that specialises in alternative energy according to its website, was working on a wind power project in Katsina.

Abdullahi said the attack happened at a village called Rimi, about 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the state capital, Katsina city.

"The gunmen later threw an explosive device into the police station on their way out the town to distract the police from pursuing them," he added.

Katsina, on the border with Niger, lies in a region assailed by Boko Haram Islamists, an insurgent group that has killed hundreds in northern and central Nigeria since 2009.

Katsina has however been spared Boko Haram's attacks, and its police chief told AFP he was confident the Islamists were not behind the kidnapping.

The extremist group says it is fighting to create an Islamic state in Nigeria's mainly Muslim north.

Security officials have blamed Boko Haram for previous similar abductions, but the group, which frequently claims gun and bomb attacks, has never acknowledged seizing a foreign national.

Following the abduction of a British and Italian in northwest Sokoto state last year, Nigeria's government sought to blame Boko Haram. Residents however ruled out the group's involvement, insisting it was the work of local gangs.

The two Europeans were killed in March amid a rescue operation jointly planned with British authorities.

In January, unidentified gunmen kidnapped German engineer Edgar Raupach in Kano state, which is next to Katsina. He was found dead in May in a home described as a Boko Haram hideout.

A private Mauritanian news agency had reported that Raupach was taken by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

AQIM has not been known to operate directly in Nigeria, though Boko Haram and other extremists in the country are thought to have links to the group.

Kidnap for ransom has long been a lucrative business in Nigeria, although most such incidents have occurred in the oil-producing south, where foreigners working for energy companies have repeatedly been targeted.

In Nigeria, which is Africa's most populous nation, most residents in the north are Muslim, while the south is predominately Christian.

*(AFP)*

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