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56 Killed, 68 Injured In Borno Market Blast

By Our Correspondents

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At least 56 people have died and 69 others injured in the Maiduguri market suicide bombing that occurred in the early hours of Tuesday, military officials, Borno State government officials and the Civilian-JTF have said.

There were conflicting accounts, however, on the brand of vehicle the suicide bomber used to carry out the attack, as witnesses either claimed it was a Pickup van loaded with charcoal while others insisted that it was a Peugeot wagon.

But most eyewitnesses said the suicide bomber was spotted driving a rickety Peugeot wagon car moving from Gwange area, a crowded central part of Maiduguri towards the market about 8am.

A member of the Civilian-JTF, who identified himself as Musa, said: "Wallahi, if I had inkling that the man had an evil intention I would have pulled him out of the

car and dealt with him.

"I was on a tricycle moving towards the market when I noticed the man trying to park by the roadside and the early-rising traders who were displaying their grocery by the roadside kept telling him to move ahead, that he was not supposed to park in front their displayed wares. We all managed to overtake him while he was still busy trying to get a parking space. His vehicle trunk was filled with sacks of what looked like charcoal. It was when we were a little bit ahead of him that we heard the deafening explosion and everywhere was dark with thick smoke."

LEADERSHIP gathered that the suicide bomber later parked in front of old Elkanemi Cinema, now converted to a car park for inter-city bus taxis.

Most of those that fell victims to the blast were old women who usually sold groundnuts and lemons as well as commuters trying to make their way to their offices, schools or markets as well as labourers waiting to offload goods from trucks that arrived at the market overnight.

Borno State governor Kashim Shettima had visited the scene of the blast where he was told by the general manager of Monday Market, Maiduguri, Alhaji Babagana Bukar, that only 17 people among them nine members of the Civilian-JTF died.

Governor Shettima, who also visited hospitals to sympathize with victims, condemned the blast, describing it as "the worst act of man's inhumanity to man, which is not only bestial but dastardly".

"We will not be deterred by the antics of Boko Haram; we will continue to provide services to our people," he said.

Though Governor Shettima had announced that the members of the Civilian-JTF should be identified, verified and compensated with the sum of N1 million each, the leaders of the Civilian-JTF led by the state secretary-general, Sadiq Abba Tijjani, said that no member of their group was killed in the blast, but they had been able to pick over 56 bodies.

"We have been able to pick 21 dead bodies that could still be identified; we also picked about 35 corpses that were either burnt or mangled beyond recognition. We took 19 injured persons to the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital; five others were rushed to the State Specialists Hospital and 21 were conveyed to the Nursing Home, while nine were taken to Umaru Shehu Ultra-modern hospital," said Abba.

All witnesses that gave their accounts said most of the victims were women and children.

A man who was seen weeping at the scene of the blast said he was on his way out with his two wives to visit a patient in the hospital when the blast occurred.

"I came out with my two wives, but after the blast, I could not locate my second wife and the first one is badly injured in the arm as a result of the blast," the confused man who did not identify himself told Governor Shettima at the General Hospital, Maiduguri.

Another member of the Civilian-JTF said the suicide bomber had engaged in an argument with some traders who said he was parking his



car wrongly in front of their stand and as such they demanded that he move his car.

"The bomber later agreed to move the car but begged some traders to help him push the car to start as the battery was weak to kick-start the engine. It was in the process of pushing the car that he let the bomb go off and he and those pushing the vehicle were shredded by the blast," said the witness.

The Sector-3 Commander of the Civilian-JTF, Iliya Saidu, under whose area of jurisdiction the blast took off, had told Governor Shettima at the council chamber of the Government House, Maiduguri, after the governor had gone round to visit victims of the blast, that they were able to carry 17 people out of which 15 were their members.

The entire scene of the blast was cordoned off for about five hours until after the police anti-bomb squad were able to sweep the entire area to ensure that it was safe before vehicles and other commuters were allowed to move towards the area.

Explosives 'hidden under charcoal'

Yesterday's explosives were hidden under a load of charcoal in a pickup van, according to witnesses who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, the Associate Press reports

Trader Daba Musa Yobe, who works near the popular market, said the bomb went off just after the market opened at 08:00, before most traders or customers had arrived.

Other witnesses said they saw about 50 bodies, and that five cars and some tricycle taxis were set ablaze by the explosion.

They said the toll could have been worse but fewer than normal traders and customers were around because most people stay up late to eat during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting from sunrise to sunset.

A security official at the scene confirmed the blast, saying many casualties are feared. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to speak to the press.

Explosions last week targeted the biggest shopping mall in Abuja, Nigeria's central capital, killing 24 people; a medical college in northern Kano city, killing at least eight; and a hotel brothel in northeast Bauchi city that killed 10.

Bomb blast injures 2 in Kaduna

A bomb went off last night at about 7:30pm in Asikolaye area of Kaduna south local government area of the state and close to the resident of the famous Islamic Scholar, Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi with two persons sustaining minor injuries while two vehicles had their windscreen shattered.

Confirming the incident, Kaduna State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) SP Aminu Lawan said, "It is true that there is a minor bomb blast in Asikolaye area off Nnamdi Azikiwe by-pass at about 7:30pm, as I speak to you now, I am at the scene of the blast.

"The blast occurred near a gutter and only two persons who were passing sustained minor injuries, they have been treated and discharged, no life was lost and no property was damaged."

According to Lawan, "our men upon the distress call went there immediately and the area was brought under control with people going about their normal activities."

Lawan also said that men of the Anti-bomb squad were on ground to ascertain the calibre of the bomb and what caused it, adding that investigation has already commenced to unravel what was the cause.

He, however called on the citizens to be more security conscious and promptly report any suspected person, group or unknown object to the police for necessary and prompt action.

One of the residents of the area also said, "It's not up to an hour that I walked pass the place and I was close to my house when I heard a loud sound. As usual I thought it was the NEPA transformer in our area that sparked only to hear that it was a bomb blast".

Boko Haram's attacks horrific – UN

The United Nations yesterday described the ongoing attacks by members of the Boko Haram sect on innocent Nigerian citizens in the northern parts of the country as horrific.

Making this known in his capacity as the United Nations secretary-general, Mr Ban Ki-moon said that the world body would not relent until those behind the insurgencies in Nigeria were captured, tried and sentenced.

Ki-moon also regretted that such violence had become an almost daily occurrence, just as he reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to support Nigeria with every resource required to tackle terrorism in the country.

In the condemnation which he made through a statement obtained by journalists in New York, the United Nations chief added that the attacks which the terrorists carried out over the weekend on villages and churches near Chibok were unacceptable to the international community.

"The secretary-general reiterates the readiness of the United Nations to support Nigeria as it responds to this challenge in a manner consistent with its international human rights obligations. He also conveys his solidarity and sympathy to the victims of the violence and

to the people of Nigeria," reads the statement.

Terrorism: Customs to begin joint border patrol - Abdullahi Bakko

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) has said that the modalities to begin a joint cross-border patrol with neighbouring African customs administrations are being worked out as part of efforts to win the war against terrorism.

Comptroller-general of the Service, Abdullahi Dikko, stated this yesterday in Abuja while briefing journalists on updates of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in March by Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Benin Republic and Chad.

He stated that the offshoot of what the director-general of Customs did was further replicated at a higher level when President Goodluck Jonathan led West African neighbours to Paris where a security meeting was held.

"While the leaders at the top have accepted that terrorism is quashed, we are working hard to see that whatever we can do within our mandate as Customs, we do it," Dikko said.

"The other Customs administrations that we agreed with are making consultations with their home government to work out the modalities of how we are going to operate. Nigeria Customs has already acquired vehicles for that purpose for when we are ready to begin," he added.

Dikko whose tenure as the vice chair of the World Customs Organisation for West and Central African (WCO-WCA) region ended last week at a handing-over ceremony in Brussels said his tenure brought tremendous benefits to Nigeria.

Dikko handed over to Cameroon after serving two terms of two years each. He listed some of the achievements to include increased visibility of Nigeria in the WCO's activities and technical expertise into the establishment of the Nigeria Customs Command and Staff College, Gwagwalada, now designated as a WCO regional training centre.

"From our interactions with WCO members in our region and other parts of the world, we have been exposed to global best practices in Customs administration and we are bringing this experience to bear on the management of Customs in Nigeria," he added.

The Customs boss also listed the hosting right for the WCO Policy Commission held in 2011 and the special invitation of President Jonathan to the 50th anniversary celebration of the WCO in 2012 as important highlights of his tenure as WCO vice chair for the region.

Gowon on insecurity: Not worrying about Nigeria's security is irresponsible

Former military head of state General Yakubu Gowon yesterday said that anyone who is not worried about the security of this country is irresponsible.

Gowon who spoke with reporters in Kaduna said as a Nigerian he was concerned about the security situation and hoped that everybody should be worried about the situation.

"I can assure you that this government is very responsible, trying its best to deal with security problems in the country.

"Who caused the security problem? it is caused by all Nigerians and the outsiders who are invited to cause the havoc that we have in the country.

"So let us all put our heads together and see what we can do in checking this menace," he said.

Speaking on the atrocities of the dreaded Boko Haram, the former head of state said the Boko Haram is giving Islam a bad name.

"I was in Kano about two days ago and I made a comment on these people who are doing this thing in the name of Islam. It is very sad, giving Islam a very bad name.

"Islam that I know in the country, those that I have worked with, and throughout my life – certainly, Islam is not about murderous people. This group that is doing this is probably not Nigerian Islam but imported, distractive Islam.

"So let us all put our heads together and deal with this particular problem," he said.

Stop Boko Haram massacres now, northern CAN tells FG

Northern Christian elders under the auspices of Christian Elders Forum of Northern States (NOSCEF), which is also affiliated to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), have called on the federal government to immediately end the massacres being carried out by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

The chairman of NOSCEF, Olaiya Phillips, who made this call yesterday during the Forum's national conference in Abuja, which was tagged "Voices Against Violence", said that the northern elders are also demanding that the federal government and the army start putting effective pressure on Boko Haram to stop killing innocent Nigerians.

According to Phillips, the army should stop being timid and harness military intelligence and police support in order to end the deadly insurgence. With the situation so dire, northern communities need all the help they can get to end the persecution that they are presently going through, he said.

ICRC helps 50,000 displaced persons in north-east

Meanwhile, as armed conflict and violence intensify in some parts of the northeast, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Nigerian Red Cross Society have said that the group has brought aid to almost 50,000 displaced and vulnerable people in the first five months of the year.

Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation in Nigeria, Zoran Jovanovic, said the conflict in north-eastern Nigeria has flared up in recent months, while other areas have seen growing tensions and armed violence.

"The number of people killed, wounded or displaced is on the rise, with children being targeted in attacks or abductions, more and more displaced people are seeking refuge in neighbouring villages, states and countries, often taken in by host communities," said Jovanovic.

Bomb scare hits Osun

Fear of bomb explosives rocked the ancient city of Ile-Ife, Osun State, yesterday when information filtered round that explosion had rocked a certain part of the town.

The development, which reportedly generated tension among residents and inhabitants of the town, threw them into a state of confusion as they ran for safety in different locations.

Investigations however revealed that an explosive device exploded at about 4:30am around the Agbedegbede area of the town.

Informed sources stated that "the bomb exploded in the area with a loud bang and also affected a house in the area, damaging the roof in the process".

At the spot of the incident, the bomb squad unit of the state police command was seen on ground performing their lawful duty while the state police commissioner, Mr Ibrahim Maisanu, who was on assessment visit was also seen physically at the scene of the incident.

However, more explosives were said to have been detected by the anti-bomb unit of the Osun State police command, as members of the unit combed the area.

Speaking with newsmen shortly after the assessment visit, the state commissioner said that it was not a bomb as being carried about by the members of the public but that it was an explosion from dynamite.

He said that there was no casualty as a result of the explosion and charged the people of the state to be security-conscious at all times.

The police boss further maintained that his command would do its best to protect the lives and properties of the people of Osun.

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