

Six dead as bombers hit governor's church

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One of the victims of the Cocin Church Jos blast in hospital ... yesterday.

A suicide bomber yesterday drove a car loaded with explosives into the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), Jos, where Plateau State Governor Jonah Jang worships.

In neighbouring Bauchi State, what is believed to be an attempt on another branch of COCIN in Miyan-

Barkate, Toro Local Government Area, was aborted by the police.

The failed attempt came barely six-hours after the Jos attack.

The police in Jos said “at least” six persons were killed by the blasts that rocked the COCIN headquarters.

Police spokesman Samuel Dabai told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) that he was not sure of the total number of those injured.

The Plateau State Chapter of the Red Cross, which declined to be

specific on the number of those killed, put the casualty figure at 50.

It's chairman, Manasseh Pampe, said the figure comprised victims taken to Plateau Specialist Hospital, Sauki Hospital and the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).

"The Red Cross took 35 victims to Plateau Specialist Hospital, 10 were taken to JUTH and five were taken to Sauki Hospital.

"But the Plateau Government later directed that all the casualties hospitalised at Sauki Hospital be moved to the State Specialist Hospital. That we have done," Pampe said.

He said three of the victims taken to JUTH had been treated and discharged while seven were still at the hospital.

Pampe, however, said he could not comment on the figure of those killed in the explosion as he declared that "it is not part of the responsibility of Red Cross".

Dabai said the two suicide bombers were killed in addition to four others including two women who died at the scene.

Two others died at the Plateau Specialist Hospital, he added.

He confirmed that one of the bombers died in the vehicle that conveyed the explosives, while the other was killed at the scene of the blast by the angry worshippers.

Dabai, however, refused to react to reports that some suspected Boko Haram members were arrested with explosives around Gada Biu area of Jos.

"I will get back to you on that. For now, I have been busy handling

the explosion situation.”

30 vehicles were damaged. One of those who died, Miss Grace Daniel, was an usher in the church.

The church, located behind the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) building, was attacked at 7:30am. Its main building and the annex under construction were affected.

The church is about 500 metres from the Police Headquarters and the Special Task Force (STF) headquarters.

Jang missed the early morning session (Hausa service) and was preparing for the second session (English) at 10am when the news of the explosions reached him.

The Boko Haram sect claimed responsibility.

The sect's spokesman Abu Qaqa told reporters in a teleconference in Maiduguri that it was a reprisal attack.

The incident came three days after the resumption of the new Commander of the STF on Jos crises 'Operation Safe Haven', Brig.-Gen. Muhammed Ibrahim.

The church's headquarters has been hosting Christians displaced from Yobe State since January as a result of Boko Haram attacks.

Undeterred by the early morning blast, however, other churches in the city held services.

A member of the church manning a roadblock, Rueben Luka, alleged complicity of the members of the STF. He said: "There are roadblocks 100 metres to the church from both sides, but the

bombers beat the security because one Toyota Hilux van of the STF preceded the car of the bomber. It was a Golf car with tinted glasses and was following the STF vehicle. We were thinking they were together and they were allowed to pass.

“As soon as the security opened the roadblock for the STF vehicle to pass, the bombers drove in with speed and headed towards their target. The STF vehicle passed to God-knows where, having led the bombers car to beat our road blocks. I can swear the bombers used the STF to beat our road block. These soldiers know of the suicide arrangement.”

Another eye witness said: “The bombers were two; one of them was dismembered by the explosion. The second had his head shattered and lay dead after the attack.”

“The bombers shouted Allahu Akbar (Allah is great) before the explosion, but God was wonderful for not allowing many casualties. From the sound of the blast, the casualties should have been in hundreds but our God intervened because we are innocent.”

Jang's Special Adviser on Media, Pam Ayuba, told reporters:

“This is an unprovoked attack. A painful one that is capable of sabotaging the peace already achieved.

“Government is disappointed mainly because Jos is under state of emergency and yet this kind of attack was allowed to take place.

“An emergency security meeting has been convened. The security agencies are expected to brief the government on why the incident occurred and, maybe, the alleged conspiracy of the STF members shall be investigated. The government will brief the media of its

finding at the end of the day.

“In the meantime, the government is appealing to citizens to remain calm and allow the security agencies to do their job. The government is also expressing its sympathy with families of the victims.”

The Bauchi Police arrested five people with weapons and improvised explosive devices with which they allegedly planned to attack COCIN Church in Miya Barkate village.

An eye witness, Mr Ikechukwu Aduba, confirmed the incident to The Nation in a telephone interview. He said: “It’s true that some people attempted to attack COCIN Church.

“The suspects are a rival group within the church. They have an internal problem and the other rival group decided to attack them this morning. So, when we got the report, we sent our men there and our men arrested about five of them (the group that attempted to burn the church). They were in possession of substances and other things that looked like explosives, but we are waiting for bomb experts to confirm because sometimes after investigation, it may turn out to be something else and not IEDs,” Aduba said.

The Commissioner of Police also said he had begun investigation into the incident and would make his report public.

He urged the public not to panic but remain law abiding and report any suspicious persons to the police who are on a 24-hour alert to ensure public safety.

An employee of Toro Local Government Area who witnessed the incident said “the suspects were arrested with sophisticated weapons and all of them, surprisingly, are Christians living in the

same area.

“They are not in the same Miyan Barkate, but from the neighboring villages of Miya Barkate and we know them.”

The eye witness added that there was confusion after the arrest of the suspects.

A statement by the STF said: “There was an explosion at the headquarters of COCIN Church near the Central Bank of Nigeria, Jos on February 2012 by 7:15 am.

“The suspected suicide bombers arrived the premises of the church in a Golf car. The Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) exploded with one of the bombers inside the vehicle while the other suspect that alighted and wanted to escape was killed in the process.

“The explosion damaged some vehicles at the premises of the church.

The statement called on law abiding citizens to go about their lawful business without fear.

Jang, accompanied by the Minister of Water Resources, Speaker of the House of Assembly Clark Dabwan and top government officials, visited the church and the hospitals where the victims of the blast were receiving treatment.

Jang said: “The attackers knew I worship at the church, but they will not succeed, I will only encourage citizens of the state not to panic or take laws into their hands. We should be encouraged that God almighty is in control.”

Former Governor Joshua Dariye also visited the church to sympathise with the church and the victims.

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