

Easter Sunday suicide bomb kills 40 in Kaduna

By [Tony Akowe, Kaduna](#) 09/04/2012 00:48:00



The smouldering remains of the suicide bomber's car...yesterday PHOTO:AFP

Kaduna, the North's political heart, had a bloody Easter Sunday yesterday. No fewer than 40 people were killed in an explosion at the ever-busy Junction Road/Sardauna Crescent, near the Ahmadu Bello Stadium.

There was a big explosion; then a fire and thick, black smoke. In minutes bodies lay on the scene and panicky residents rushed indoors.

The road was strewn with charred motorcycles and debris. The scene usually hosts many residents who gather to eat at informal restaurants and buy black market gasoline. Nearby hotels had their windows blown out by the force of the powerful explosion, which engulfed a group of okada commercial motorcycle operators.

At least, 38 people were killed in the blast, said Abubakar Zakari Adamu, a spokesman for the Kaduna State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). Others suffered serious injuries and were receiving

treatment at local hospitals, Adamu said.

The explosion badly damaged the nearby All Nations Christian Assembly Church where an Easter service was going on. The church was the possible target of the bomber. Witnesses said it appeared the explosive-laden car attempted to go into the compound of that church before it detonated.

“We were in the holy communion service and I was exhorting my people and all of a sudden, we heard a loud noise that shattered all our windows and doors, destroyed our fans and some of our equipment in the church,” Pastor Joshua Raji said.

Another witness, Augustine Vincent, said he was riding a motorcycle just behind the car when it exploded.

“God saw our heart and saved us,” he said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, though suspicion immediately fell on Boko Haram sect.

Boko Haram, whose name means “Western education is sacrilege” in Hausa, is waging an increasingly bloody fight with security agencies and the public. More than 380 people have been killed in violence blamed on the sect this year alone, according to an Associated Press (AP) count.

The sect, employing suicide bombers and assault-rifle shootouts, has attacked both Christians and Muslims as well as the United Nations’ headquarters in Nigeria.

The sect has rejected efforts to begin indirect peace talks with Nigeria’s government. Its demands include the introduction of strict

Shariah law across the country, even in Christian areas, and the release of all imprisoned followers.

The blast also comes as Britain and the United States had warned its citizens that violence was likely over the Easter holiday in the North.

In his Easter speech at the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI mentioned the ongoing violence in Nigeria. Catholic churches have been targeted in previous attacks.

“To Nigeria, which in recent times has experienced savage terrorist attacks, may the joy of Easter grant the strength needed to take up anew the building of a society which is peaceful and respectful of the religious freedom of its citizens,” he said.

The Nation gathered that the suicide bomber attempted to go into an area with about three or more churches located side by side, but was turned back by the security who mounted a road block at the junction. The blast also destroyed property worth millions of naira, with majority of those affected being commercial motorcyclists and black marketers of petrol.

SEMA boss Adamu said: “We took seven persons at Rakiya Memorial Hospital, out of whom five have died while the remaining two have been transferred to 44 Army Reference Hospital where about 20 others have been taken. At the St Gerald Hospital, out of the 10 people taken there, five have died while the remaining five are receiving treatment.

“At Barau Dikko Hospital, we have six bodies with six others injured; while about 20 people died on the spot. In all, we have about 36 bodies while 13 others are seriously injured.”

A Red Cross official who would not want his name in print, said the agency collected five bodies from the scene and are treating about 15 others for serious injuries, adding that there was the possibility of more casualty since the security agents and other emergency workers also evacuated bodies from the scene.

About 60 buildings, including Fina White House Hotel and Marhaba Hotel, residential houses alongside the All Nations Christian Assembly located along Gwari Road behind Marhaba Hotel were badly affected by the blast. Six vehicles, including a Honda CRV car, were affected.

The explosion, according to an eye witness account, occurred at about 9.45 am when the lone suicide bomber attempted to enter Gwari Road where the All Nations Christian Assembly and the ECWA Good News Church are located. He was stopped.

The eye witness said the suspected bomber was dressed in a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. He had a set of military uniform on the car's back seat.

One of the survivors, who claimed to have witnessed the explosion, said: "We were three inside the car when suddenly I heard a loud explosion in front of me and suddenly, I saw billows of smoke and fire under my vehicle. I quickly opened my door and when I looked around I didn't see my mechanic again. I am still shocked how I survived."

Augustine Vincent and his cousin, Aaron Idiawaje, who are receiving treatment at the St. Gerard Catholic Hospital, claimed that they were riding on a motorcycle directly behind the bomber when the explosion occurred. They attributed their "miraculous" escape to "the

blood of Jesus”.

They said truly Jesus Christ resurrected and that was why they were saved. “We were on our way to Christ Embassy church by Station on Kachia Road and God saw our heart and saved us,” Idiawaje said.

A guest of one of the hotels affected by the explosion said when the blast occurred, the window of the hotel fell on his head, but no guest was affected. The explosion destroyed the hotel’s windows and doors.

Another survivor said: “I was driving past the scene of the incident along with two other occupants when suddenly I heard a loud sound that almost blocked my ear. When I looked in front of my car, I saw smoke all over the place while fire was coming out from under my car.

“The man at the back seat of my car, who is my mechanic was nowhere to be found. Even when I called his mobile phone, it was switched off, and so my fear is that he might have died as a result of the explosion. I don’t know how to thank God for surviving this bomb blast,” he said.

One of the security men attached to ECWA Good News Church, Gwari Road where the suicide bomber was said to be heading, Francis Markus, said: “It was around 10 am when I saw a man trying to enter this street who said he wanted to pass through. I told him that he cannot because the church service was on going.

“We don’t normally allow people to pass through when service is going on because of security. I advised him to go through after the

church service, but he insisted that he was going to his house. He pointed at a one storey building and I know many of the people living in the house.

“I did not recognise his face because I work here every Sunday. So, I stopped him from passing through the street. But he pointed at another house.

“He came through Arochukwu Road at about 9.45am. He drove in an Honda Academy ash-colour car. I told him that he cannot pass through here. He accused me of violating his right by not allowing him to go to his house.

“I asked him to wait till after church service before he could pass through, but he insisted. We dragged this for some minutes. He entered the car and drove towards me, yet I stood my ground and held the iron bar that we use to block the entrance. He hit the iron against me.

“At that stage, one of my church members came with his bike and intervened. We noticed that the man was carrying an Army uniform at the back seat of his car. An Army cap too was behind the screen.

“I asked him if he was an Army officer and behaving like this? I told him, a disgrace to the Army, he is misbehaving, instead of giving me a helping hand. I politely told him to move his vehicle and leave the place.

“As we were arguing, the policemen posted to the church saw what was happening between us. They came closer and assisted me to get him out of the place. But within three minutes after he left, we heard the explosion across the road, along Junction Road.”

Kaduna State Police Commissioner Mohammed Jinjiri Abubakar said two vehicles were used for the operation. He said: "Situation report indicated that today (yesterday), 8th April, 2012 at about 8:45hours, intelligence report received said two suspected vehicles heading towards Kakuri / Sabon Tasha axis exploded while in transit.

"The two vehicles were pursued by Detective Corporal Francis Marcus and then, suddenly one of the vehicles hit the other, thereby causing a serious bomb explosion between the two vehicles on Junction road by Sardauna Crescent in Kaduna.

"The bomb explosion was massive, which resulted from the death of the suicide bomber and five persons, 16 injured victims were passers-by. Police and other security agencies are investigating the issue and final report will soon be made public.

"I want to appeal to the people of the state to remain calm and to go about their lawful business and to report any suspicious movement to security agents for further investigation and action."

Senator Mohammed Saleh, representing Kaduna Central, who visited the scene of the explosion, described it as a national disaster. He said security agencies should go back and do a postmortem to find out why it happened and how to respond.

Senator Saleh said: "at a time like this, we have to re-assess our response to security situation as we go along. I am aware that before Easter, there was a massive security leakage because it was expected that something like this is likely to happen and certain measures were put in place, yet it happened.

"Left to me, this is a war situation and in a war situation, you use all

the instruments of your power to fight it.”

The member representing Kaduna North in the House of Representatives, Alhaji Shehu Usman, blamed security agencies for the incessant explosions and called for the immediate disbandment of road blocks.

He said security agents should devise a way of checkmating suicide bombers and assured that the National Assembly will assist security agencies to restore the peace in the North and the country in general.

Usman also asked the Federal Government to go back to the negotiating table with the Boko Haram, with a view of finding a lasting solution to the security challenges in the country.

National Emergency Agency (MEMA), Director-General Mohammed Sani Sidi, who visited St. Gerard Catholic Hospital and Barau Dikko Specialist Hospital, to see the victims, said the agency would foot their hospital bills.

There is usually a traffic jam on the Junction Road where the blast occurred.

A Consultant to Fina White House hotel, Julius Acholonu said: “This bomb blast is horrible.

“My happiness is that at the time it happened, there was only one guest in the rooms. You can see the room he was staying; it is only God that can bring somebody alive from that kind of ruin. It was a terrible ruin. In fact, God did it in a way that the guest came out unhurt. And he checked out immediately.

“In all our hotels, we have put a lot of security measures in place. We don’t allow you to park your car in front of our hotel, except you are our guest and as you are parking, our security men will be there to welcome you and check your car. And as you are entering into the room, we have a security man to check your bag, your body, everywhere, before you are allowed to enter the room.”

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