

Suicide bomb at Nigeria church kills 9

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Kano - A suicide bomber who tried to drive an explosives-packed car into a church in northern Nigeria on Sunday killed at least nine people, including himself, and injured 35, officials said.

Speeding up his vehicle, the attacker approached a checkpoint near the church in Bauchi State, which has previously been hit by Islamist group Boko Haram and where tension between Muslims and Christians has led to violence in the past.

"We have a checkpoint not far from the church which prevented the bomber from gaining access to his target," said state police commissioner Mohammed Ladan.

"So he rammed the car into a security gate and the car exploded, killing him and eight other people," he added.

"Many people were injured but I can't give you any precise number because the hospital is still trying to take a toll."

Witnesses said the force of the blast near the Harvest Field of Christ Church on the outskirts of Bauchi city caused the building to collapse on the worshippers inside.

The head of the Nigerian Red Cross in Bauchi state, Adamu Abubakar, told AFP he counted 35 people injured at an area hospital.

Residents said that when the building collapsed, some worshippers fled outside seeking refuge, but ran into a raging fire.

"There was confusion as residents and churchgoers tried to flee. Some of them out of fright fell into the fire caused by the explosion," said resident Timothy Joshua.

Beaten to death

Another witness, who requested anonymity, said the bomber had an accomplice who tried to escape the scene after the blast went off, but was chased down and killed by enraged residents. Police could not confirm this account.

"The other bomber abandoned the car they came with and wanted to flee, but he was pursued by a resident and worshippers and beaten to death," this witness said.

Boko Haram has claimed attacks that have killed more than 1 000 people since July 2009 in Nigeria,



Bauchi checkpoint

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Africa's most populous state and largest oil producer.

The group's most daring raid in Bauchi came in September 2010 when it claimed a jailbreak that freed more than 700 inmates, including 100 Boko Haram members.

The Islamists have also repeatedly targeted Jos, in neighbouring Plateau State, the site of some of Nigeria's worst sectarian violence.

Boko Haram is believed to have a number of different cells, some with ties to foreign extremist organisations like al-Qaeda's north Africa branch, which has reportedly provided weapons training in northern Mali.

Others cells are thought to have a more domestic focus, but frustration has mounted as the group's attacks have grown more sophisticated, covering a wider area of territory.

Political and civil leaders in Nigeria's mainly Muslim north have spoken out over the government's apparent inability to contain the Islamist threat.

President Goodluck Jonathan, from Nigeria's majority Christian south, has encouraged Boko Haram to enter talks, but an attempt to negotiate launched earlier this year quickly fizzled.

- AFP