

Nigeria church attack: Death toll hits 21

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Johannesburg/Abuja - The death toll from a suicide bombing outside a church in Nigeria has risen to 21, with security forces to blame for the eight of the deaths, the head of the Christian Association of Nigeria was quoted as saying on Tuesday.

"Twelve died as a result of the bomb blast while eight were shot dead by the military who went to the blast site to maintain law and order," Lawi Pokti, the director of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Bauchi, told the Vanguard newspaper.

Pokti did not include the bomber in the death toll.

A suicide bomber on Sunday blew up a car laden with explosives outside the Harvest Field Pentecostal Church in Bauchi State, some 400km north-east of the capital Abuja.

Witnesses reported that police and soldiers had opened fire at the scene of the bombing where a crowd had gathered.

"We declare that the security has no moral, ethical and empirical justification to open fire on the women, youths and children who came out to mourn their loved ones. We see this act as extra-judicial killing and worthy of remorse by the Nigerian Army," Pokti said.

Media reports said the Islamist group Boko Haram, which is seeking to impose strict sharia doctrine in the north of the country, claimed responsibility for the bombing.

- SAPA



People stand in front of a damaged church building following a suicide bomb attack in Bauchi, Nigeria. (Shehu Saulawa, AP)

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