



Bloodbath in Borno, Plateau as suicide bomber attacks churches

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A SUICIDE bomber and some gunmen yesterday revved up the spate of terror attacks in the country when they struck at two churches.

While the suicide bomber struck at the Christ Chosen Church, Rukuba Road, Jos North Local Council, Plateau State, the gunmen launched an attack on Ekilisiyan Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN) Church, Biu Borno State.

The Jos church suicide bombing, which occurred at about 11.15 a.m. while the day's service was on, left three people dead, alongside the suicide bomber whose vehicle was mangled beyond recognition from the impact of the blast.

Forty-one worshippers were injured in the blast, which also destroyed the church.

The incident triggered a reprisal attack carried out by some youths in the Rukuba Road area who killed eight commercial motorcycle riders by setting them ablaze with their motorcycles.

Special Task Force (STF) operatives who came on the scene shot sporadically into the air, sending the rampaging youths scampering for safety.

Spokesman of the Plateau State Police Command, Emmanuel Abuh, said: "At about 11.00 a.m., a suicide bomber went to attack the Christ Chosen Church at Rukuba Road, Jos. The suicide bomber had not reached the church proper before the bomb exploded, killing the suicide bomber. The intensity of the bomb with its heavy vibration of the explosion caused the church to collapse. Two persons were killed very close to the church in circumstances yet to be ascertained by the police. The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Emmanuel Ayeni, led a team of police operatives to the scene."

According to Abuh, 37 of the injured had been taken to the Bingham University Teaching Hospital, Jos for treatment while four were taken to Plateau State Specialist Hospital. He added that four vehicles were burnt in the attack.

However, as at the time of filing this report, calm had returned to the scene.

Authorities of Bingham University Teaching Hospital shut out the media from their blood-spattered wards where the majority of the injured were on admission but charged residents to donate blood to the victims.

An injured Evangelist, Sunday Mshelia, braved his head injury to pray for others in more serious conditions at the hospital.

Biu is 187 kilometres south of Maiduguri, the Borno State capital and headquarters of the Boko Haram sect. It is also one of the five councils under the state of emergency imposed by President Goodluck Jonathan on December 31, 2011.

Two worshippers, including a woman, were killed in the EYN attack. Fifty-four people were injured in the shooting, which occurred at about 9.00 a.m.

The gunmen fired several shots through the church's doors and windows.

Many of the injured were rushed to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Gombe, as the Biu General Hospital could not cope with their numbers.

Confirming yesterday's attack, the Borno State Police

Command's spokesman, Gideon Jibrin, said: "Five suspected gunmen this morning at 9.00 a.m. attacked the EYN Church in Biu, killing a woman and wounding three other worshippers. The gunmen fired several gunshots at the Church congregation."

He said no arrests have been made over the incident, as the police were still investigating it to determine the exact number of

casualties.

Chairman Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Biu, Samson Bukar said: "I called my colleagues who confirmed that some gunmen attack EYN Church during Sunday Service this morning. Shooting sporadically, they killed a female church usher and another male worshipper, injuring over 50 others, who were rushed to Gombe Medical Centre for treatment."

Meanwhile, Minister of Interior, Abba Moro, has condemned Jos church bomb blast.

In a statement, Moro described it "as another dastardly act by those who have no sanctity for human life."

The minister commiserated with those injured in the blast and called on "those behind the spate of bombings in the country to embrace the window of dialogue opened by President Goodluck Jonathan in the interest of every Nigerian."

Moro wondered why places of worship had become regular target of deadly attacks and charged Nigerians to remain vigilant.

He added: "We must not be deceived by the act of these few individuals who want to set us against one another by trying to give their evil intention a religious coloration. We must remain resolved as citizens of this great nation to fight this attack on our collective destiny".

According to the minister, "there cannot be any meaningful achievement if we continue this violent trend that is completely alien to our culture".

In a related development, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Bala Mohammed, has described the bomb attack on some churches in Yelwa area of Bauchi State as "alien" to the state and prayed that such a tragedy never happened again.

He donated the sum of N10 million to augment the state government's efforts to facilitate the treatment of the injured, burial arrangement for the dead as well as the rehabilitation of the damaged churches.

A statement by Bala's Chief Press Secretary, Hazat Sule, disclosed that the FCT minister made the donation at the weekend at the Palace of the Emir of Bauchi, when he paid a condolence visit.

Meanwhile, fresh facts have emerged over plots by certain elements in the country to destabilize the Jonathan's administration using Boko Haram as cover.

Sources said a group of individuals unhappy with some key appointments without their approval, have vowed to destabilize the government through the perpetration of violent attacks on strategic national institutions.

The sources cited the continuous retention of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Gen. Andrew Azazi as unacceptable to this group, and they have vowed to continue to sabotage his efforts to curb national insecurity.

According to the sources, the aggrieved group are angry that the strategic office of the NSA has for the first time left the North and is currently being held by "a southerner and outsider". It is particularly aggrieved that discreet hints to President Jonathan to dump Azazi have failed to yield fruit.

To this end, the group it was learnt, has vowed that the present administration would not know peace until their demands were met by returning to status quo ante.

The group is said to have been pressuring the President through some powerful politicians and traditional rulers to sack Azazi and replace him with any of the former military chiefs that have held the office before.

Azazi who assumed the office on October 4, 2010 became the first non-northern to be appointed NSA since independence.

Other military chiefs who had at several periods served as NSA are Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, a retired Major General who between January 2, 1990 to August 30, 1993; Abdullahi Mohammed, also a retired Major General served as NSA between July 3, 1998 to May 29, 1999; Aliyu Mohammed, a retired Lieutenant General, served as NSA between May 29, 1999 to June 1, 2006 and Sarki Mukhtar, a retired major general served as NSA between June 1, 2006 to March 8, 2010 while Gusau returned to serve between March 9, 2010 and September 20, 2010.

Sources also confirmed that there are deep fears over the safety of Jonathan if the position of the NSA slips into the hands of those currently scheming for it. As one source noted, "Jonathan has no problems with the North. After all, millions of northerners voted for him. He is however keenly aware that the office of the NSA controls the Presidential Air Fleet (PAF) and, therefore, directly oversees his safety in the air. Some of those lobbying for the position now are persons Jonathan cannot entrust his life to."

And piqued by the continuous terrorist attacks on churches, the Project Director West Africa NGO Network, Peter Egbule, has urged President Goodluck Jonathan to order the interrogation of identified sponsors of the Boko Haram Islamic sect.

Egbule, in a lecture on "Terrorism: A Bane of Societal Development," at the yearly general meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Lagos at the weekend, called on the President to jettison any move to negotiate with the group.

"It is true that other criminal persons and groups may be committing violent acts under the guise of Boko Haram in a bid to escape detection, we as a people should contribute to expunge these unwelcome visitors in our midst," he added.

On his part, the President of YMCA and renowned industrialist, Chief, Chris Ogunbanjo, said since conflict cannot be avoided in the society, only prayers can solve the problem, because only the awesome power of God can change the heart of the perpetrators of terrorist acts.

Nigerians, he said, should show some level of patriotism by constantly praying for the end of the problem, since there is nothing prayer cannot do.

On his part, the Chairman of YMCA, Mr. Taiwo Bewaji, said: "We should go back to the two laws of the Lord, which is the basis of our prayers, which is love your God and love your neighbours as yourself.

"If we love our neighbours as ourselves, all these things that have been happening will not happen. Because the other man would have recognised that look, what I would not do to myself, I should not do it to my neighbour."

He also cautioned that retaliation was not an option for Christians, "since even the Lord said, we should pray for our enemies, so that they can recognise what they are doing and change; that is when the Lord has actually taken control of everything.

"The Lord has said, vengeance is mine, so who are we."

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