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### Suicide Bomber Hits Maiduguri Market as Global Outrage Trails Baga Massacre

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President Goodluck Jonathan and US Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry

- Military repels attack on Damaturu, says it is studying situation in Baga for appropriate response
- Jonathan, Kerry hold phone conversation on security

By Damilola Oyedele, Senator Iroegbu in Abuja and Michael Olugbode in Maduguri

A major market in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, came under a suicide bomb attack on Saturday afternoon which led to the death of 20 people, with 18 others left with varied degrees of injuries. Hours later, a suspicious vehicle that had been stopped at a checkpoint outside the city of Potiskum, in neighbouring Yobe, exploded at a police station as its driver was being taken in for questioning. A police officer accompanying the car and the driver were killed, an officer said.

On Friday, militants fought running battles with troops in the Yobe state capital, Damaturu, leading to the destruction of a mosque, shops and a market. The attack was said to be a reprisal for an offensive by civilian vigilantes and local hunters against a Boko Haram enclave in southern Yobe on Tuesday.

Also, global outrage and condemnation have continued over the deadly sect's attack in Baga, Borno state, which may have claimed up to 2000

lives.

Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Police, Borno State Command, Gideon Jubrin, said the suicide bomb attack on the Maiduguri market, which occurred at about 12:30pm, left the female suicide bomber and 19 others dead.

Eighteen people were also injured in the blast at the market, which has become the epicenter of such attacks, as this was the third time in three months it would be coming under the attack of female suicide bombers unleashed by Boko Haram.

In a text message, police the spokesman said: "Twenty persons were killed in the attack including the female suicide bomber with 18 others injured at the market."

The death toll may however rise because the attack was carried out when the market was packed with traders and shoppers. As at the time of filing this report yesterday afternoon, the site of the explosion had been cordoned off by security agencies and aid workers were searching the area for survivors or bodies.

The spokesman of National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), AbdulKadir Ibrahim, said workers from the agency were at the market to give aid and that he would be able to give details when they return.

It was gathered that a female suicide bomber attacked the market at about 12:30 pm Saturday.

The attack was at the Yen-Kaji area of the market where chickens are sold.

The market in the Borno state capital was cordoned off as health officials began the grim task of sifting through the wreckage and collecting body parts. A van of the Red Cross was seen conveying injured persons to the hospital.

An attack at the same market on December 1 killed more than 10 people, and a week earlier more than 45 people lost their lives in an attack there.

On July 1, at least 15 people were killed in another suicide attack there blamed on the militants.

Boko Haram were seen as behind the attack in Maiduguri as it has increasingly used women and young girls as human bombs in their deadly campaign for a hardline Islamic state.

Civilian vigilante Ashiru Mustapha said the blast happened as the girl was being searched at the entrance to the market.

"The girl was about 10 years old and I doubt if she actually knew what was strapped to her body," he told AFP.

Witness Abubakar Bakura said: "The blast split the suicide bomber into two and flung one part across the road. Among the dead are two vigilantes who were searching the girl. I am pretty sure the bomb was remotely controlled."

A Red Cross official, who declined to be named, warned: "Many people sustained life-threatening injuries."

Both blasts came a week after a major Boko Haram attack on the fishing town of Baga in northern Borno State, which is believed to be the worst in the bloody six-year insurgency.

The town and at least 16 nearby settlements in and around Lake Chad were burnt to the ground and at least 20,000 people forced to flee their homes.

"For five kilometres (three miles), I kept stepping on dead bodies until I reached Malam Karanti village, which was also deserted and burnt," one survivor, fisherman Yanaye Grema, said.

Global outrage and condemnation have continued over the deadly sect's attack in Baga, Borno state, which may have claimed up to 2000 lives.

Amnesty International has claimed that the attack is the deadliest in a series of attacks by Boko Haram, with a disturbing and bloody escalation of onslaught on civilians.

Spokesperson of the US Department of State, Ms. Jen Psaki during a daily press briefing in Washington at the weekend condemned the escalating violence in Northern Nigeria.

"The US abhors such violence which continues to take a terrible toll on the people of the broader region including. Cameroon. We extend our sympathies to the loved ones of all victims of violence in the hands of Boko Haram," she said.

Psaki urged Nigeria and its neighbouring countries to take all possible steps to address the urgent threat of the terrorist group.

"Even in the face of these horrifying attacks, terrorist organisations like Boko Haram must not distract Nigeria from carrying out credible and peaceful elections that reflect the will of the Nigerian people," she added.

In the same vein, the European Union said the renewed attacks in North Eastern Nigeria were another expression of terrorism targeting innocent people.

In a statement by its High Representative and Vice President, Federica Mogherini, the EU lamented that the attacks had led to the destruction of at least 16 villages and reportedly killed hundreds of people while displacing thousands.

"The Boko Haram insurgency was discussed at the recent EU-Nigeria Ministerial Dialogue. It will also be addressed during the next regional

Security Conference to be held in Niamey on 20 January," the statement released in Brussels said.

The EU, Mogherini said, remains committed to providing a comprehensive range of political, development and humanitarian support to Nigeria and its people in tackling this threat and in ensuring the sound development of the country.

Meanwhile, President Goodluck Jonathan and US Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, have held discussions on the security situation with the US reiterating its commitment to support Nigeria in addressing the violence caused by Boko Haram.

Both men held telephone conversations on a broad range of issues on December 6 and December 30, 2014.

Psaki disclosed this while responding to a question during Department of State's daily press briefing on Friday where she disclosed that the US interdisciplinary team was still on ground in Nigeria.

"We remain committed to our counter terrorism relationship and our strategic relationship in that regard, and that we are - remain in close contact as is evidenced by the Secretary's calls with the President," she said.

On reports that the US does not think the Nigerian military is professional enough because of allegations of corruption, Psaki said there is an ongoing dialogue to address any dissatisfaction.

"...and as it relates to certain funding, there are certain requirements on that, that are applicable around the world. But I think the fact is we've provided a range of funding to

Nigeria to address their counter-terrorism needs, to fight against Boko Haram. They remain an important partner. The Secretary is engaged- obviously, that's a very high level-with them and the needs they have, so this is an ongoing dialogues," she said.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian military said it had embarked on a mopping up operation around Damaturu, after successfully foiling and containing the Boko Haram terrorists attempt to capture and occupy parts of the Yobe State Capital.

It also said plans were underway for the Nigerian component of the Multinational Task Force (MJTF) to launch a counter-offensive to recapture Baga town where many civilians are said to have been massacred by Boko Haram.

The Director of Defence Information (DDI), Maj-Gen. Chris Olukolade, in a statement yesterday said that the terrorists had launched massive attack from different directions of the town on Friday evening.

Olukolade however noted that the troops were promptly mobilized to repel the attack that lasted the night resulting in heavy casualty on the terrorists before the rest of them retreated.

He said that weapons including Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Rocket Propelled Grenades captured from the terrorists are being compiled while their dead as well as civilian casualties are yet to be determined.

Olukolade said, "the situation in Baga is still being studied to determine the appropriate action that will restore law, order and normalcy to the community after the attack mounted by hundreds of heavily armed terrorists of last weekend. A total of 14 soldiers were killed in action during the attack, while over 30 who were wounded are now receiving medical attention. Most of those declared missing in action have also rejoined their unit in the ongoing reorganization for further operations.

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