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NIGERIA Christmas celebrations marred as fatal bombings trigger violence in Plateau State, and pastor is murdered in Borno State

Communities in northern and central Nigeria are reeling after multiple bomb attacks claimed at least 32 lives in Plateau State on the same evening that a pastor and seven church members were murdered in Borno State.

Fighting has broken out in the Nassarawa Gwong, Dutse Uku, Abattoir and Rigip areas of Jos in Plateau State, where two predominantly Christian neighborhoods were rocked by a series of bombings on Christmas eve as people were late night shopping or relaxing in bars. Two explosions occurred in bars in the Angwan Rukuba area, while another took place in Gada Biyu. Around 28 seriously injured people were admitted to the ECWA Evangel Hospital, while others were taken to Jos University Teaching Hospital. Many victims lost limbs, while others had shrapnel removed from their bodies.

Christmas Eve in Maiduguri in Borno State was marred when Bishara Baptist Church was razed to the ground by attackers who were later identified by State Police Chief Mohammed Abubakar as members of the Boko Haram Islamist sect. The church's pastor and four elders were burnt to death, and three church members were shot dead outside the building. An EYN Church was also attacked with guns and petrol bombs that night; however, there were no casualties.

In a comment to CSW in the aftermath of the bombings in Plateau State, Anglican Archbishop of Jos Benjamin Kwashi said: "We must celebrate the birth of our redeemer. It is no small sacrifice that Jesus paid with his becoming flesh, dying on the cross just to redeem me and all the world. We are called by Christ to follow him; this is in spite of what is happening in the world, including Jos. We will celebrate Jesus; it's a choice we have made and to do otherwise is to submit to a defeated foe - Satan. Good will always win over evil."

CSW Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said: "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who lost their lives in these appalling attacks. The bombings in Jos constitute a significant escalation in the violence in Plateau State, while the attacks in Maiduguri appear to herald an unwelcome new dimension to the violence perpetrated by extremist groups. It is therefore vital that state and federal authorities work together to urgently track down and prosecute the planners and perpetrators of this violence in both states, and to ensure that every citizen in this multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation is able to practice his or her religion without fear of attack."

Notes to Editors:

1. In 2009, Boko Haram (Western Education is Sacrilege/Forbidden) launched uprisings in several states which ended when their headquarters in Maiduguri was overrun by the Nigerian armed forces. Their leader was subsequently caught and extrajudicially killed. As well as attacking government targets during the uprising, the sect also attacked churches and kidnapped and beheaded several Christians.
2. The sect resurfaced this year when it besieged and destroyed the central prison in Bauchi, freeing some of its members. It has also been in action in Borno state, where village heads and others who informed on Boko Haram have been targeted for murder along with police officers.

