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NIGERIA Muslim cleric assassinated in northern Nigeria for speaking out against Islamist militia

A prominent Muslim cleric was assassinated on March 13 in Maiduguri, Borno State, by members of the Boko Haram Islamist militia.

Imam Ibrahim Ahmed Abdullahi, who advocated non-violence and decried the religious sectarianism currently afflicting parts of northern and central Nigeria, regularly spoke out against Boko Haram's activities and ideology. He was shot five times by gunmen who fled in a jeep as he sat outside his home, which was next door to his mosque.

Nigeria hoped it had seen the last of Boko Haram following the siege and destruction of its headquarters in Maiduguri in 2009. However, an attack in September 2010 on Bauchi Federal Prison that destroyed the complex and freed more than 700 inmates, including around 100 alleged members Boko Haram, heralded the group's return.

Since then, Maiduguri has experienced a wave of gun attacks attributed to Boko Haram. The group initially targeted members of the security forces and Muslim leaders who were deemed to have betrayed it. However, over the Christmas period the group also mounted several attacks on church services, killing around 15 Christians and destroying at least five church buildings.

Imam Abdullahi's murder follows the high-profile assassination in January of the gubernatorial candidate for the All Nigeria People Party (ANPP). The Imam is the second religious leader to be assassinated by Boko Haram since its re-emergence. In October 2010, its gunmen targeted Imam Bashir Kashara, who had also criticized the group's doctrine on his weekly show on state-run radio. The latest killing occurred despite a heavy security presence in the area. "People are leaving the city every day", a Maiduguri resident informed CSW. "There are killings on a daily basis, at times two people are killed every other day. We only go out if it's urgent. These people kill when they want to kill. Our only hope is in the Almighty".

Meanwhile, six people died following attacks by armed Fulanis on two villages in Plateau State during the evening of March 13. One person died during an assault on Gohok Village in Vom, Jos South, while five others were killed in Kai Village in Barkin Ladi. Four of these victims were members of the same family.

CSW Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said: "CSW condemns the assassination of Imam Abdullahi, and we send our sincere condolences to his family. Our prayers are with them and our hope is that his death will not deter peace-loving people from both religious communities from speaking up for justice and bridging the religious divide. CSW also condemns in the strongest terms the incessant attacks on villages in Plateau State and the wanton destruction of innocent lives that seems to be occurring on a weekly basis despite the security presence in the area. We call once again on the Nigerian authorities to take robust and effective action to bring a definitive end to this violence by tracking down the perpetrators and masterminds of these actions, and bringing them to justice."