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NIGERIA Bomb explodes at All Christian Fellowship Mission in Niger State while Maiduguri is rocked by violence

A man and two women died when a bomb exploded at the All Christian-Fellowship Mission in Suleja, Niger State on Sunday July 10, while Maiduguri in north eastern Nigeria was rocked by violence that has been described as the worst this year.

The blast in the Suleja church occurred just after 3pm, as several church members were taking part in a committee meeting after the church service. Two people died on the spot, including Justina Odogbo, the wife of the committee chair. Four others were critically injured, and were rushed to hospital, where one died.

Suleja is situated close to the Nigerian capital, Abuja. The area may have been picked as a softer target, since security in the capital has been tightened and a curfew is in place there. Although no group has claimed responsibility for the blast, the attack follows unconfirmed reports of a message issued by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram warning Nigerians to avoid Christians, security agents, and government institutions and functions, or risk death.

Over the weekend the northeastern city of Maiduguri suffered a further upsurge in violence, which one resident described as "hell let loose". On Saturday night, two days after the Borno State government banned the use of motorcycles in order to thwart further attacks by Boko Haram, multiple explosions rocked parts of Maiduguri. Also on Saturday, members of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) charged with security in the state are reported to have gone "on a rampage and caused a lot of havoc" after an army patrol was targeted in a bomb and gun attack by Boko Haram. According to local residents, the military closed off the area where the attack occurred, and went from house to house rounding up and executing males within a certain age bracket, who were deemed to be possible members of Boko Haram. On Sunday, churches in Maiduguri remained closed following the previous night's violence and warnings of imminent targeted attacks by the Islamist group.

Stuart Windsor, Special Ambassador for Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "If the alleged Boko Haram statement is accurate and their target is now shifting increasingly towards the church, Christians are in greater danger than ever, as their places of worship provide soft targets. It is vital that state and federal authorities ensure that adequate protection is afforded to these establishments, and that security is deployed during church services. However, reports of possible irregular actions and extra-judicial executions by some members of the JTF are deeply worrying and must be investigated as a matter of urgency. It is crucial that security arrangements for the country as a whole and for Maiduguri in particular are conducted with sensitivity, in order not to alienate and further victimize innocent members of the public, who are already traumatized by the actions of this violent group."