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NIGERIA Boko Haram kills four Christians and threatens village attacks

Boko Haram gunmen yesterday shot dead four Igbo Christian men in Potiskum town in Yobe State, and threatened to launch an attack on two nearby villages later that evening.

The four men were reportedly shot in a vehicle as they were migrating southwards to rejoin their families, who had already moved to that area to escape the violence. Previous attempts to join them had been hampered by the indefinite general strike against fuel subsidy removal, which has brought the nation to a halt.

On the same day, Boko Haram also threatened to attack Kukargadu and Dagare villages, both of which have large populations of indigenous Christians. However, extra security personnel were deployed to the villages, which were consequently kept safe through the night.

On Tuesday, eight men and a woman were killed by suspected Boko Haram gunmen in Potiskum. All nine are thought to have been Christians. The group, which included a lecturer at the Federal College of Education/Technical in Potiskum, four policemen and a young man employed by Jam'a Clinic, were in a bar in the Dorawa Ward when they were shot at by gunmen who escaped on motorcycles. On the previous day, two Christians were also shot at by gunmen on a motorcycle in the Barracks area of Potiskum, but escaped unhurt by falling to the ground and playing dead.

A 24-hour curfew has now been imposed in Yobe, and motorcycles have been banned due to Boko Haram's regular usage of these vehicles.

The deteriorating security situation has led to rising speculation that Yobe State could soon be entirely emptied of its Christian population as entire lorry-loads of people have been departing the state. One source, who informed CSW-Nigeria he was assisting over two hundred families of indigenous Christians with relocation, said, "If this continues unabated, in the next few months or weeks there may be no Christians in Yobe State. Though our houses, jobs and churches are here, we have no choice but to leave".

In several instances, fuel subsidy removal protests are being used for alternative agendas. On Tuesday, a fuel protest in Gusau, Zamfara State, degenerated into an attack on Ebenezer Baptist Church as rioters removed equipment and other valuables from the premises and set them on fire. A 24-hour curfew was imposed in Kaduna City and its environs yesterday, after Muslim youths went to the governor's official residence on Tuesday claiming they wanted to seize control. Yesterday a 6am to 6pm curfew was imposed in Niger State after rioting broke out in the capital, Minna, and the governor's campaign headquarters was attacked.

Meanwhile, retaliatory attacks on Hausa-Fulani neighbourhoods in Benin City in southern Nigeria on 9 and 10 January during fuel protests resulted in five deaths, mass displacement and the destruction of an Islamic School attached to the central mosque. This worrying development follows a week of violent events in Adamawa State that left at least 37 people dead in which southerners were specifically targeted.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply grieved by the continuing deaths, injuries and displacements across Nigeria. The fact that an entire local Christian population is being forced to flee from their

homes and the deliberate targeting of the Igbo population by a terrorist group are appalling manifestations of religious and ethnic cleansing. We call on the state and federal officials and security agents to do everything in their power to end Boko Haram's reign of terror and bring an end to the ongoing violence, which constitutes an immediate threat to the unity of this multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation."