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NIGERIA Suicide bomber targets church in Jos

A suicide bomber drove a car into the Jos headquarters of the Church of Christ in Nigeria denomination (COCIN) during the morning worship service on Sunday, February 26, killing three people and injuring 37. The Islamist group Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to eyewitness reports, the suicide bomber was driving a Volkswagen Golf, and was accompanied by a man in military uniform, who left the car at the gate of the church. The bomber forced the car onto the premises, causing an industrial gas cylinder which was in the car boot and probably designed to amplify the effect of the blast, to fall out before the explosive was detonated.

The bomber and two church members died in the explosion, while 37 others were injured, and many vehicles were destroyed. The soldier who had accompanied the bomber was almost lynched by angry crowds and later arrested.

As youths took to the streets in protest at the bombing, a Muslim-owned shop situated close to the church that sold car accessories was burned down, and fighting in an area close to the Township Stadium resulted in several injuries. Violence continued late into the evening, with at least one person reported to have been killed. However, the city is reported to be calm today due to an increased security presence.

There is speculation that security arrangements for the English service at the COCIN church were not as thorough as for the Hausa service, and that the bomber may have taken advantage of this in order to carry out his attack.

Prior to this attack, reports had emerged of the discovery of a list of potential Boko Haram targets in Jos, that included the COCIN headquarters Church, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) headquarters Church, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, St Luke's Anglican Cathedral, St. Pirans Anglican Church, Living Faith Church and the home of the Anglican Archbishop.

President Goodluck Jonathan condemned the violence and appealed for calm. In a statement he said, "The indiscriminate bombing of Christians and Muslims is a threat to all peace-loving Nigerians."

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "We extend our heartfelt condolences to those who lost loved ones in this senseless attack, and in the subsequent violence that it triggered. While we are encouraged by increased security presence, which has restored calm and reassured local residents, we also urge for sufficient additional security to be deployed at identified potential targets."