



3.13.2012

NIGERIA | 12 dead in suicide bomb blast at Catholic church in Jos

There is increasing anxiety in the Christian community of Jos in Plateau State following a second suicide bombing at a church within a two week period, which claimed eight lives.

The suicide bomber detonated the bomb, which was in his car, just outside the gate of St Finbarr's Catholic Church in the Rayfield area on Sunday 11 March, after a policeman prevented him from driving onto the premises. The impact was heard up to two kilometres away, and shattered the glass in buildings within a 200m radius. Three of the victims were women who were leaving the church after the first service of the day, and one of them was pregnant.

In an interview, the Rev Father Peter Omore of St Finbarr's Catholic Church, said that the second service had just started when they heard the explosion. "The Church shook and the glass shattered and the PVC ceiling all fell in... I do not know the number of casualties now."

The Plateau State Commissioner for Information expressed his grief at the incident. The Anglican Archbishop of Jos, Rt Rev Benjamin Kwashi, said, "It is worrying that two bombs have gone off within the space of two weeks, and many are fearing a third. Most importantly, a palpable terror is being unleashed on Christians so that Sunday is transformed from a day of worship into a day of fear. We are appealing to the church worldwide to pray without ceasing, and to members of the international community to speak up and take action on our behalf so that we are able to enjoy full religious freedom and worship God freely and without fear."

The blast provoked an angry reaction from local youths, who are not affiliated with the church, and in the immediate aftermath three men on motorcycles were killed and their vehicles set on fire. When the youths went to the nearby Joint Task Force (JTF) security post demanding to know how the car had eluded checks, and insisting that the soldiers leave, four of them were shot and injured by the security forces. The youths later refused to be placated by the governor and reportedly demanded the removal of the security forces from the state so that they could be responsible for their own defense, adding that they would be taking all necessary measures. They then proceeded to drive the soldiers out of the area and mounted their own road block.

Five other people were reportedly killed in ensuing violence in the Ungwan Rukuba area last night and this morning. Early reports of ten deaths from "reprisal attacks", which were widely circulated, cannot be confirmed by sources on the ground, and stoked tensions in the volatile situation.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We express our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who died in the suicide bomb attack on St Finbarr's Catholic Church, and in the subsequent violence. There is clearly frustration with the inability of the security forces to get to grips with the attacks on churches, and there are concerns that in the case of Plateau State, efforts are being made to shift the focus from Boko Haram to blaming churches for the violent response of youths from local tribes. We urge the federal government to make the security of Plateau State an urgent priority, to restore peace and security to civilians in Jos."