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## NIGERIA Boko Haram target university campus, press for first time

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Christians in northern and central Nigeria are reeling following armed attacks by the Islamist Boko Haram militia on worship services in two northern states that claimed dozens of lives.

On the morning of Sunday, April 29, members of Boko Haram attacked two lecture theaters in Bayero University Kano (BUK) where congregations were holding church services. According to local reports, there were explosions, and then gunmen opened fire simultaneously and indiscriminately at the fleeing crowds in both venues in an attack that allegedly continued for over 40 minutes. So far 22 people are confirmed to have died during the attack, including three professors and a doctor, while 23 are receiving treatment in hospital. Local sources report the university is still being cordoned off by the security services.

On the same day, suspected Boko Haram gunmen attacked the Sunday service of a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation in the Borno State capital Maiduguri, killing five people, including the pastor, just as the communion service was underway.

The events at BUK mark the first attack by Boko Haram on a university premises. Commenting on this attack a local source told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW): "Our lives are being hunted like animals in the bush. The Church in northern Nigeria is in even bigger trouble than we realize. Please mobilize global prayer for us."

Last week, and in another first, bomb attacks at newspaper offices in the capital Abuja and the northern city of Kaduna left at least nine people dead. An eye witness to the Kaduna bombing informed CSW Nigeria that after being prevented from parking his car at the Kwantagora Junction by security personnel, the bomber informed them that he had an explosive device in his vehicle. When asked to remove and disarm it, he threw it on the ground, where it exploded, killing five people instantly and injuring many others. The bomber was arrested after being rescued from an angry mob.

In a subsequent statement Boko Haram warned of further attacks on the press in response to "misrepresentation", adding that "ThisDay" newspapers had been particularly targeted to avenge a 2001 article on the Miss World competition that was alleged to have insulted the Prophet Mohammed, and had sparked serious religious violence.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We extend our condolences to the families of those who died in these abhorrent events. Sadly, we are seeing some regrettable landmark attacks as Boko Haram's campaign of violence focuses on an increasing range of civilian targets. While the motivation for Sunday's attacks was clearly religious, Boko Haram has illustrated its intolerance of diversity and democracy by also targeting the security services, recreational establishments and now universities and the press. There can no longer be any doubt that Boko Haram is a terrorist organization utilizing violence and the threat of violence to bring about its long standing aim of transforming a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state into a country governed by its own interpretation of shari'a law. We continue to call for a decisive, intelligence-led strategy by the security services, with the support of the international community, to deal robustly with an organization that is intent on destroying the very fabric of Nigerian society."