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NIGERIA Unrest in Jos as army launches offensive in Plateau State

Trouble flared briefly in the Plateau State capital Jos yesterday when a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fired from a moving vehicle on the Ungwar Daba Bukuru Express Way damaged nearby buildings and killed a seven year-old boy. While it has been reported internationally that the target was the Nurul Islam School, there is local speculation that it may have been aimed at the National Youth Service (NYSC) orientation camp at Zang Commercial Secondary School.

According to CSW sources, upon hearing the explosion Muslim youths in the area took to the streets with guns, but were eventually brought under control by the security forces. No casualties were reported. Earlier that day, raiders had attacked the Sabon Gida Kanar area, also in Bukuru, killing three people.

Elsewhere in Plateau State, hundreds of people from five villages in Riyom and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas (LGAs) have moved to allocated camps after the Special Task Force (STF) issued a 48-hour deadline for evacuation, ahead of a large scale offensive targeting the group responsible for the spate of deadly attacks on non-Muslim villages in these areas that have claimed hundreds of lives since 2010. Although the STF has described this is a temporary measure to avoid civilian deaths in crossfire, some representatives of the Fulani villages claim it may be permanent.

The offensive comes after an estimated 100 people died in coordinated armed attacks on an estimated 12 villages, and a subsequent attack on funeral goers that claimed the lives of three politicians.

The Islamist sect Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the shootings in Plateau State and for the suicide bombing at Maiduguri's Central Mosque on July 13, in which five people were killed, the first time that Boko Haram has attacked a mosque. The teenage bomber is thought to have been targeting dignitaries in attendance, in particular the Shehu of Borno, a prominent traditional Muslim ruler, and the Deputy Governor of Borno State.

On the same day, three gunmen murdered the education secretary of Marte Local LGA in the state at his home. Then on Monday, Nigerian news agencies reported that the councilor who represented Bolari Ward 1 had been shot dead in her Maiduguri home during curfew hours by unknown gunmen who also stole her jewelry.

Boko Haram is also thought to be responsible for a car bomb that exploded at a filling station near a Living Faith church in Okene, an area close to Lokoja, the Kogi State capital on Sunday, June 15. One of the would-be bombers was apprehended, and two days later security forces in Kogi uncovered a bomb-making factory in Okaito, Okehi LGA. The two room bungalow was reportedly disguised as a mosque in one room and a church in the other, and among other things, stored 46 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

Meanwhile, in Kaduna State, three members of Boko Haram were apprehended by local youths in Rigasa and Mahuta suburbs of Kaduna metropolis on July 16. The gunmen had entered the compound of the District Head of Afaka, Alhaji Abdulwahab, in a bid to kill him. Local police report that one of the suspects led them to a hideout where a number of items were recovered, including two bags of chemicals, a jerry can of acid, and eight car alarm systems.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) said, "We offer our deepest condolences to all who have lost loved ones in recent violence. CSW welcomes the security breakthroughs in Kogi and Kaduna. While very concerned at the latest attack in Jos and the use of an RPG, we also welcome the effective intervention by the security forces that ended the subsequent violence and efforts by the STF to apprehend the perpetrators of the incessant murders in Riyom and Barkin Ladi, which are long overdue."