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NIGERIA | At Least 50 Dead in Northeast Weekend Attacks

At least 50 civilians were killed and dozens more injured in a series of weekend attacks in northeastern Nigeria by the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram.

Twelve people are reported to have been killed when Boko Haram members dressed in military and police uniforms attacked Ngom, a village situated between Mafa and Konduga Local Government Areas in Borno State, on Sat., Aug. 10. Several sources report the victims' hands were tied behind their backs prior to their throats being slit. According to an unconfirmed report, 19 people from surrounding villages were also murdered in a similar manner on Sun., Aug. 11.

Also on Aug. 11, Boko Haram gunmen attacked Konduga Central Mosque and adjoining mosques in Konduga Town during early morning prayers, killing 46 worshippers and injuring at least 30 people, 26 of whom required hospital treatment. At the same time, other members of the group petrol bombed and destroyed around 50 homes. This was Boko Haram's first large scale attack inside a mosque. The group had previously targeted individuals on their way to or from prayer.

The attacks occurred despite the existence of states of emergency in Borno and Yobe States, and are thought to be in retaliation for a growth in vigilantism as local communities work increasingly successfully with the security services to expose Boko Haram members and sympathizers. Boko Haram is reported to have murdered 45 villagers it accused of belonging to vigilante groups or collaborating with the military during two separate attacks in Borno State in July.

The attacks occurred as Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau released a video message in which he claimed responsibility for recent violence in Borno and Yobe States and vowed it would continue until northern Nigeria was Islamized. Claiming the sect was too strong for Nigeria and could now "comfortably confront" the United States, he also called on people to join the sect, shun democracy and western education, and embrace Islam and jihad. "Forget about the constitution and accept Shari'a...and we shall continue to kill those who strive to stand against the will of Allah by opposing Shari'a," he said.

In a comment on the weekend's violence, the Rev. Yunusa Nmadu of CSW Nigeria said, "We condemn in the strongest terms this unwarranted taking of human lives. Our constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and it is particularly appalling that so many people were murdered in places of worship by a group that attributes religious motivations to such unjustifiable actions and purports to be working for the wellbeing of the people they have murdered. We urge the federal government to maintain extreme vigilance and to step up the process of protecting lives and properties in north eastern Nigeria."