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NIGERIA | Boko Haram Kills Muslim Cleric, 11 Christians

A Muslim cleric from Kaduna State, his wife and child, and 11 Christians in Adamawa State, were murdered in separate attacks last weekend by members of the Islamist terror group Boko Haram.

Thousands of people attended the funeral of prominent Salafi cleric Sheikh Mohammed Awwal Adam, known locally as Sheikh Albani, on Feb. 2 in Zaria, Kaduna State. On Feb. 1, gunmen in cars and on motorcycles reportedly intercepted and opened fire on a vehicle driven by Sheikh Albani with students and members of his family inside. His wife and one of his sons died instantly, while the Sheikh died on the way to the hospital. Three of his children and one of his students, who were sitting in the back of the car were reportedly hospitalized after suffering bullet wounds.

Sheikh Albani, who led the Daarul Hadeethis-Salafiyyah School, owned the Albaniy Science Academy in the Gaskiya layout in Zaria, and delivered weekly lectures at Markazu-Salafiyyah Centre in Tudun Wada, Zaria. The Sheikh was known for expressing radical and controversial views about Christianity, other Muslim sects, the polio vaccination and the government. He had spoken out increasingly strongly against Boko Haram, and his lectures criticizing the sect were recorded and sold throughout the region. Sheikh Albani is survived by three wives and over 20 children.

On Jan. 31, Boko Haram gunmen attacked an evening service at the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) church at Sabon Garin Yamdula village in the Madagali Local Government Area (LGA) of Adamawa State. According to eyewitness accounts, the gunmen were dressed in military attire but were wearing "slippers instead of boots." After storming the church, they fired sporadically, killing 11 people, including the senior pastor, who died later in hospital. The gunmen also attempted to burn down the church but were repelled by youths and local vigilantes firing hunting guns. The attackers reportedly escaped into the bush, carrying away foodstuffs and five cows in their vehicles. Two church members are reportedly still missing.

The attack on the EYN church was the second mounted by the Islamist sect on a church in Madagali LGA in less than a week. An estimated 53 people are reported to have died on Jan. 26 during an attack on a Catholic church in Wada Chakawa Village in Madagali LGA and a subsequent raid on a village on the Nigeria-Cameroon border. According to a Muslim eyewitness interviewed by local media, prior to attacking Wada Chakawa the gunmen had mounted a roadblock in a nearby area and killed many Christians.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) said, "Not for the first

time, Boko Haram has murdered a Muslim cleric for not espousing its version of Islam, and has killed Christians who were peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion. Both of these appalling attacks illustrates Boko Haram's wanton disregard for the sanctity of human life. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of all who lost their lives in these cowardly attacks. Clearly Boko Haram constitutes a threat to all who do not adopt its infamous interpretation of Islam. We urge the security services to ensure the perpetrators of these crimes are swiftly apprehended so that those who dissent with Boko Haram's narrow and violent ideology are free to do so without fear."