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NIGERIA | 20 Dead in Mosque Attack

Around 20 people may have died when gunmen attacked a mosque in Buni Gari village in Yobe State, northeastern Nigeria, during the early hours of April 5.

The gunmen, believed to be members of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram, are reportedly attacked Buni Gari just as villagers were gathering at the mosque for dawn prayers. The village is situated around 60 miles south of the Yobe State capital, Damaturu, in an area that has witnessed several attacks since 2011.

As well as targeting Christian communities and federal institutions and employees, Boko Haram has increasingly attacked Muslim communities it deems to have betrayed it and Muslim clerics who oppose its narrow interpretation of Islam.

On Feb. 1, Boko Haram gunmen in Kaduna State assassinated radical Salafi cleric Sheikh Mohammed Awwal Adam, also known as Sheikh Albani, who had become increasingly critical of the sect. In a recorded admission of the group's role in Sheikh Albani's murder, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau also threatened northern traditional rulers and prominent Muslim politicians, warning against involvement in the political process. On April 6, the sect launched attacks along the Maiduguri-Biu highway and in the Gwoza council area, killing at least 25 people, including politicians on their way to the Borno State capital Maiduguri to attend an All Progressives Congress, (APC) stakeholders meeting.

Yobe State was the site of Boko Haram's abortive uprisings in 2003 and 2004. Targeted attacks on predominantly Christian communities since 2011 have resulted in a significant flight by Yobe's indigenous Christian community from their ancestral home. In February 2014, over 50 people were killed, most of them students, when sect members attacked the Federal Government College in Buni-Yadi. More recently, Boko Haram gunmen attacked a military checkpoint in the Ngelzarma community of Fune Local Government Area (LGA). The steep surge in attacks by Boko Haram in the northeast of the country since January 2014 has resulted in the deaths of over 1,200 civilians.

Elsewhere, the Government of Cameroon is reported to have deployed heavily armed troops in the north of the country following the kidnapping of Italian priests Giampaolo Marta and Gianantonio Allegre and Canadian nun Gilberte Bussie by suspected Boko Haram gunmen on the evening of April 4. Seventy-year-old Sister Gilberte had lived in Cameroon for four decades and was due to return to Canada following a prolonged period of ill health. Seminarian Ladde Pierre, who witnessed the kidnapping and alerted police, said the armed men arrived shortly before midnight by car and ransacked church buildings before assaulting the priests, who are both said to be in their 50s, and abducting the victims.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We extend our condolences to the families who lost loved ones in the attack on Buni Gari and in the subsequent attacks in Borno. There must be no ambiguity about the fact that despite its religious justifications, Boko Haram's terrorist campaign is ultimately aimed at seizing political power, and they have no qualms about killing innocent civilians regardless of their religious affiliation. The perpetrators of these atrocities must be apprehended so that Nigerians of all creeds can once again exercise their right to gather together in worship in safety, and feel secure in their local areas. Our thoughts are also with the kidnap victims. We pray for their swift and safe release and urge the Government of Cameroon to continue consolidating security efforts in its northern region in coordination with the Nigerian authorities in order to ensure terrorist elements are deprived of any potential safe havens."